THE GREAT PANDOLFO

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BY

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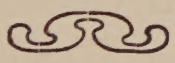
THE COMING OF AMOS,
PERELLA, ETC.



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CHAPTER I

PAULA FIELD was a woman who suffered most people gladly. Such is a gift, like that of song or painting or the solving of acrostics. Consequently she had many more friends, all over the world, who loved her than it was in human power for her to love in return. Now and then the jealous turned scorpion-wise and stung her. They called her insincere, which is the penalty of large-heartedness. Not that she ever promised more than she could perform; but the small-minded read into her sympathy more than she could think of promising. She was also a woman of peculiar personal attraction. Sir Spencer Babington, one of the coming men in post-war diplomacy, and a noted weigher of dry words, once remarked that, a century or so ago, she would have been a reigning toast. The fact of his being in love with her for years past did not detract from the accuracy of his diagnostic.

All kinds of men had fallen in love with her during her nearly thirty years of life. Only one had she selected, and that was a soldier man, Geoffrey Field, whose bones now lay in a prim little cemetery by the Somme. He was a gallant fellow; she had given him her heart; and to all suitors she would say in effect: "What is the good of a woman without the least bit of a heart left to give?" Some sighed and went away. Others gave her to understand that heart was not everything that they were looking for; and, as she had no fortune, in fact was hard put to it to make ends meet, she found herself in the posi-

tion of the Lady in "Comus," and like her, dismissed the rabble-rout, but in terms less direct and more graciously ironical. To neither camp did Spencer Babington belong. As maid, she had suffered his adust wooing; as wife, she had proved him a loyal friend; to her, as widow, he remained a faithful swain; and smiling endurance of boredom in his company was her only means of expressing a sincere gratitude.

Still there were limits. A woman's nerves are not always under control. When the body is enmeshed in a network of sensitive microscopic strands, a certain petulance of expression may be forgiven.

They were in her little flat in Hansel Mansions, under the lee of Harrod's stores. It was a sunless, airless day in July, the kind of day in which she, big creature bred in open spaces, felt herself at her worst. Spencer Babington had come in casually for tea, and, uninfluenced by meteorological conditions, had asked her to marry him, just as though they had been wandering in scented hay fields, or sitting before the open mystery of the moonlit sea. Paula was conscious of dampness; of a wisp of hair sticking to her forehead. It takes a wise man to appreciate the folly of making love to a damp woman—especially when the love-making is uphill work. In the ways of women Sir Spencer Babington was not wise. Gently repulsed, he pressed his suit.

At last she said wearily:

"My dear Spencer, you would be a much pleasanter creature if you would take no for an answer."

"This, then, is final?"

"The finalest thing you can possibly imagine."

His fingers moved in the correct Englishman's miniature gesture.

"It's a pity," said he.

"What's a pity?"

Here the inevitable petulance. She sat up away from her cushions; somewhat combative.

"In the circumstances," said he, "it's rather an odd question."

"Not a bit. You've asked me for the fourth time this year——"

"The fifth," he corrected.

"Call it the n*th*. What does it matter? Once more I tell you I can't marry you—for the simple reason that I don't want to. You say it's a pity. I ask why? For a diplomatist the phrase is loose. It sounds as if you were sorry for me; as if in my pigheadedness I had missed something to my advantage."

He rose and stood before her, tall, lean, distinguished; clean-shaven, grave, just a bit bald; fingering a tortoise-shell-rimmed eyeglass that dangled from his neck by a broad silk ribbon. Although he was precisely dressed—for everything about Spencer Babington was precise—this eyeglass was the only sign of foppery about him. No man had ever seen him fix it in his eye. A vivacious lady had once said that he must use it exclusively in his bath to examine his conscience.

"Isn't that rather cruel, Paula?" he asked.

She replied that she was open to an explanation.

"It's a pity," said he, "that two old and tried friends like us can't unite our lives. It is I that miss all the happiness and comfort you could give me. To me the loss is a million pities. I have a position with no one to share it; a great house with no one to adorn it; thoughts, tastes, ambitions with no one on whom they can react. A very solitary life, I assure you."

She replied, a trifle irritably—he was so dry and she so damp: "In your forty years, you could surely have

picked up a hundred female reagents in any quarter of the globe."

Again the tiny gesture—this time of despair.

"It pleases you to—wilfully—misunderstand me."

He split the infinitive with an air of deliberate sacrifice.

Paula laughed—and when she laughed, she was adorable in most eyes. "No, my dear, I don't misunderstand you. I've known you ever since I was a child. I'm awfully fond of you. You're the only real man friend I have in the world."

"Then," said he, "why on earth——?"

"That's it," she interrupted. "Why on earth do you want to convert a valued friend into an inconsiderable husband?"

"I object to the term," said he, drawing himself up stiffly. "After all, I'm a man of some consideration."

"Of course you are, you dear foolish Spencer." She laughed again. "Where's your logic? Who said you weren't? I was speaking of you not as a man, but as a husband. An unloved husband, must, *qua* husband, be inconsiderable. Mustn't he?"

Obstinate, he declined to agree with her proposition.

She saw that he was hurt. But he always had been hurt when she refused to marry him. And her heart was always pricked with remorse for hurt inflicted. There was monotony, however, in the recurrence of the pangs.

She rose and, as tall as he, a slim and stately woman, laid her hands on his shoulders.

"I have a hundred good reasons for not wanting to marry you, but a thousand for not wanting to spoil precious life-long relations."

Could woman let down man more graciously? But he went on arguing.

"Our points of view are different. It's only a matter of reconciling them; of bringing our spiritual vision, as it were, into a common focus. I can't conceive the possibility of those relations being spoiled. Quite the contrary. You twitted me just now about remaining a bachelor. I should have thought that, perhaps, in a woman's eyes, fastidiousness might be a merit. I couldn't pick up other women by the hundred, for the simple reason that you happened to exist. That you knew in the years gone by. I had hopes. But the gods—and yourself—thought otherwise."

He turned away, not without feeling and dignity, and stared across the street at the display of perambulators and invalid chairs in the opposite floor-window of Harrod's stores. She followed him and said softly:

"How can I help it if the gods—and I—are still of the same opinion?"

He swung back. "Then you've made up your mind never to marry again?"

She nodded. "I'll never marry again."

"That's one grain of comfort, at any rate," said he.

When he had gone, she moved restlessly about the small close drawing-room. It was too early to dress for the dinner-party to which she was bidden. The sense of loneliness oppressed her. Did she really mean that, all through the years that stretched before her, in bleaker and bleaker perspective, she would be content to remain faithful to Geoffrey's memory? Supposing she lived till seventy. That would be forty-one years. Forty-one years all alone. Alone always, with no one to greet her when she entered her home at night. Alone, save for a maid or two, for her household must ever be modest, all night long for forty years, in flat or villa. Alone, when,

in the morning, she faced the day. Alone, as she was now, even for an hour, with naught for company but sorrowful memories.

Yet now, in the pride of her beauty and birth and position, all was fairly well. Social distractions beguiled that dreadful consciousness of solitude. But in the years to come, when her beauty should fade, as fade it must—even though she bejezabeled herself like hundreds of faded women of her acquaintance—a generation must arise that knew her not, and pass her by, having no use for her. The aforesaid elderly women, clinging passionately to past beauty, carried on because they were rich. It was a ghastly and degrading thought. But one must face actualities. Their means maintained them in the *statu quo* terribly *ante*. But who in twenty years' time would want or seek from charity or even think of the painted harridan—there can be no crystal globe more fuliginous with inspissated gloom than the soul of a woman confronted with the possible decay of her beauty—who had to think twice before she could ask two or three people to dinner and give them a drinkable bottle of champagne.

She brushed her hair impatiently from her damp forehead. She had not the remotest desire in the world to be a painted harridan. She adored the dears who grew old gracefully. She saw herself—twenty years hence, at forty-nine—a pleasant grey-haired old lady, living out a peaceful old age in a Gloucestershire village, with a resident cat and a visiting curate.

Of course she could go on with her writing. She had the knack of dainty description and for some time had contributed a couple of weekly articles to sound journals. She had written a novel, of which (genteelly reviewed) she had sold nearly four hundred copies. Perhaps, if she

persevered, she might acquire an absorbing interest in life together with a tidy income. But all that didn't do away with the loneliness.

There had been a girl child born of her brief and war-accidented married life; as healthy a baby as could owe its existence to superb parentage. It had contracted some infantile malady and died. Had it lived, there would have been supreme reasons for existence. She could have faced the years to come unfalteringly. All that, however, was over and done with long ago; almost forgotten; hidden only in the sacred depths of memory. She stood, where Spencer Babington had stood, by the window gazing absently across the way, and, becoming conscious of the perambulators, turned with an absurd little pain in her heart.

A social letter or two lay on her writing table awaiting answers. She sat down and took up pen and paper. At present her life was full; she would be ungrateful to complain; but it was full of vain and unsubstantial things. A silver framed photograph of her late husband stood on the railed top of the table; a frank and gallant fellow in the familiar uniform. There is scarcely a home in Great Britain without some such poignant reminder of stricken flower of manhood. If we forget that for which these died, we deserve the curse of whatever God there be who rules our destinies.

For a time, Paula, elbows on table and chin in hands, communed dumbly with the portrait. Would he think it worthless, selfish, wicked of her, to marry again? Just some kind, plain man who would give her companionship and save her from the nightmare of decrepit solitude. He knew that she had been his, body and heart and soul. She had tried to be brave and face the world with an air and a flourish, just as he had faced the enemy; but she

was a coward; a splendid show and nothing more. Would he mind if ever——? And, as she looked, the stern lips seemed to smile, and in her ears there seemed to come the sound, from infinite distance, of the well-remembered voice murmuring consolation. . . . "Dear old thing, how can you think me such a lunatic dog-in-the-manger? You're in the flesh with which I have nothing to do, except to wish for your happiness. I'm in the spirit, and in the spirit you're mine eternally, no matter how many rotten old husbands you have." She heard his careless laugh.

She rubbed her eyes, stretched out her arms and again took up her pen.

"What a silly fool I am," she said.

She rattled off her notes in a bold and generous hand and tried to read a novel. But her thoughts wandered. Why all this pother of emotionalism because dear old Spencer had asked her, once again, to marry him? She had known him all her life; the same dry stick of a man. A faithful friend; yes. And she, should he need her ministrations as counseller, agent, nurse, would, so as to afford them, willingly cross seas and continents. Loyal as was her regard, distinguished as was his career, she could not marry him were he the last man left on earth. There was no question of his distinction. From his rooms in Balliol he had absorbed all the honours that the University of Oxford had to bestow. He had but to appear in the Foreign Office, as a young man, to glimmer in his impressive lambent way, as the perfect, God-created private secretary. And since those early days he had gone far. Paula had ever watched his path with amused interest. But a short while before, at an official reception, when he had come up to her, his lank person ablaze with decorations, and she saw impending in his glance the

(n-1)*th* proposal, she had shielded her eyes and begged him, a magnanimous Jove, to spare poor Semele. Unless he came upon her, as to-day, in an irritable mood, she could never regard Spencer Babington unhumorously. Of what there was in him to arouse the Comic Spirit she was not aware. The little Imp of Mischance, whose delighted business is the exploitation of human infirmities, had something, but not everything, to do with it. The aforesaid Imp, finding Paula's maid and Babington's valet together in the same country house had locked their heads together in mutual confidence. As a result, the former, devoted, invaluable, yet irrepressible remnant of her girlhood's ease, had informed her mistress of a few of Sir Spencer's lighter idiosyncracies. Paula had a short way of repressing Simkin's gossip. But Simkin had a lightning way, born of practice, of conveying it. Before Paula could shut the fountain tap, she learned that Sir Spencer had a highly developed system of underwear. He had a dozen suits of flannel pyjamas numbered from one to twelve, which must be served to him in exact rotation according to the linen book kept in his own handwriting. A mistake and the wheels of his household were declared to be out of gear, the domestic economy of the country to be a thing past praying for, and the whole of Europe to be in a state of Bolshevist disruption.

"Hold your tongue, Simkin. How dare you tell me such disgusting tittle-tattle?"

So would Paula flame indignant and for the moment blast further confidence. But Simkin had got in first with her lightning flash, and had impressed imperishable pictures on her mistress's mind.

Thousands of women maintain the happiness of married life by dint of viewing their husbands through the God-given prism of a sense of humour. But they have got to

be married first—before God gives it them. When He gives it to women beforehand, ninety-nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a hundred thousand, recognize it is a Warning and turn the gentleman over to less gifted sisters. The Imp of Mischance may have had something to do with Paula's refusal of Babington; but, as before stated, he had not everything. Even when circumstances would have warranted, and Paula herself, like any reasonable woman, would have pardoned impassioned eloquence, his utterances were marked by an incongruous frigidity. And one definition of a sense of humour, as good as another, is a perception of the incongruous.

Again, why should this eminent and irreproachable gentleman's repeated proposal of marriage have sent her off her balance? She could not say. If every woman knew exactly what was going on within herself the earth would be a less secure planet than it is even at present.

By the time she had dressed for her dinner party she had recovered her serenity. After all, there were still cakes and ale in the world, agreeable to the palate. And she had beauty and health and young blood coursing through her veins. It was to be a stuffy and politico-financial party. But her old hosts, she knew, held her in sincere affection, and their broad and welcoming smiles would be compensation for any after dullness.

She was waiting, lightly cloaked in her drawing-room, for a summoned taxi to be announced, when the telephone bell rang. A servant's voice. Mrs. Field? Lady Demeter wished to speak to her. Would she hold the line? Then:

"Is that you, Paula dear? It's Clara speaking. Can you come down to-morrow for the week-end?"

Paula laughed. "What's the matter?"

"This eleventh hour invitation? Do be an angel and come and I'll tell you all about it."

"Anybody dead or bolted?"

"No, no. An unexpected odd man. And he'll be entirely out of the picture. You'll come, won't you?"

"Yes. But I must come down late. Do I know the man? What's his name?"

"Pandolfo. Sir Victor Pandolfo."

"Never heard of him," said Paula.

CHAPTER II

It was Lady Demeter's amiable foible to turn her West Hertfordshire house once a week into a den of lions. They arrived, sprucely maned and elegantly tailed, in time for tea on Saturday, and they were courteously yet firmly chivvied away before lunch on Monday. They could bring with them wives, husbands, trainers and other attendants. The house was large, with plenty of roaring space, so that if a second lion entering any apartment found the first occupant a bore (in the words of the poet) he could go forth and roar somewhere else to his perfect satisfaction. Lady Demeter, a fearless Daniel, moved among them tactfully. She had the gift of reconciling the all but irreconcilable. At Hinsted Park were contracted the most unlikely friendships and the least imaginable of matrimonial alliances. Now and then a timid little white-haired man would be seen creeping about, and the lions would ask one another who he was and what the deuce he did and, by dint of patient inquiry, would eventually discover he was Lord Demeter. Afterwards they recognized him as the man who, late at night, apathetically sought to know whether they would have brandy or whisky with their soda. He was dreadfully afraid of his wife's lions.

She was a burly, high-complexioned woman of capacious mind and bosom; a worthy lady, very bountiful and efficient; she sat, heavily, as chairwoman on many committees. She would give any new lion ten minutes at Hinsted and he would eat out of her hand.

In the hall or outer-den, a stately place staircased and galleried, did two lions meet that Saturday afternoon. They were the first arrivals, and they motored down on a day of summer drought, happening to pass and repass each other angrily, so that their throats were filled with mutual dust and their hearts with mutual dislike, especially when they arrived almost simultaneously at the same destination. One was Spencer Babington. He greeted his hostess with a prim "How d'ye do, Clara?"

Said the other: "My dear lady, what a delight to see you in this perfect setting."

Then Lady Demeter: "I wonder whether you two know each other——"

"We've seen a great deal of each other on the road. All the way from the Marble Arch," answered Babington.

"I got the best of you," cried his road rival with a great laugh. "My chauffeur's the most marvellous driver in Europe."

Babington's lips curled into the withered smile of the professional diplomatist. "Why not in the world?"

"Why not? No doubt he is. If I thought he wasn't, I'd sack him. I'll tell you about him one of these days."

"You can't until you're properly introduced," laughed Lady Demeter. "Sir Spencer Babington—Sir Victor Pandolfo."

"If I had known it was you," said Pandolfo, "I'd have——" he paused.

"What——?" Babington inquired.

"I'd have gone twice as fast, so that you wouldn't have been inconvenienced. She can do a hundred miles an hour as easily as twenty."

Babington's manner was of the coldest.

"Really?" said he.

"Just a cheap American car. I took her to pieces.

Fitted her up with all sorts of contrivances of my own of which no one has got the secret yet. An experiment, you see. And as I tell you, she's a wonder. A bird on wheels."

"At any rate, after your experiences, you must both be very thirsty," said Lady Demeter, moving to the tea table. "Tea, Spencer?"

"If you please."

"Sir Victor?"

"May I take advantage of the promise of more cooling streams which I see over yonder?"

Pandolfo waved a hand to a table against the wall set with gleaming silver and glass and crystal jugs and ice and decanters.

The lady smiled hospitably. He turned half-way:

"Perhaps Sir Spencer will change his mind?"

"Thanks, no. Tea is more refreshing. One lump, dear Clara. A thousand thanks."

"Your lump doesn't clink like this, my dear fellow," said Pandolfo, coming forward with a great tumbler glad with the music of ice. "This is good, Lady Demeter. The concocter is almost a genius; but not quite. I'll give you a secret that will make him one. A dash—a mere dash of Fernet Branca."

"What is that? I don't know it," laughed Lady Demeter.

"If Sir Victor will excuse my saying so," Babington interjected, "it's the most obnoxious liquid—a kind of bitters—that only the perverted taste of modern Italy could have invented. It ties the tongue into knots and destroys the coat of the stomach."

"On the contrary, my dear fellow. It titillates the healthy tongue and stimulates the healthy stomach. It's one of Italy's priceless boons to mankind—mother of im-

mortal boons that she is. Besides, you take it in drops, not in jorums like tea."

Lady Demeter glanced anxiously at the clock. There were still twenty minutes before the train guests could arrive; and no one else was expected by motor. Never had she entertained two new lions more mutually antipathetic. She had hoped for the mixture of other elements. What, thought she, could be common ground for a famous inventor and a diplomatist not without celebrity? Furthermore: for a spacious creature of wide gesture and proclamation and a dry, thin-lipped apostle of secrecy? She talked rather wildly of the house and its artistic treasures. There was that Sassoferrato, for instance. Demeter, poor dear, had been persuaded to buy it, unframed and rolled up, by a Russian Grand Duke in whose family palace it had hung for a couple of centuries. But it was too pretty-pretty for her taste.

Babington crossed the hall, fingering the ribbon of his tortoise-shell-rimmed monocle, and examined the picture.

"A very fine example, indeed, with all the artist's exquisite finish. I don't hold with the people who profess to despise the later Eclectics. They carried on the torch, the sacred torch of Raphael. I have a Sassoferrato in my own little collection—but, I'm afraid, of doubtful authenticity." He turned, holding out the never-used eye-glass. "If Demeter should like to part with it—well, there's a congenial home for it in Eaton Square."

"If it depended on me, my dear man, you could tuck it under your arm and walk away with it now," said Lady Demeter, with a laugh. "But you've got to reckon with my money-thirsty husband."

Meanwhile Victor Pandolfo, mighty glass beaker still in hand, had inspected the picture. He strolled back to the tea-table.

"Splendid. Sassoferrato didn't reach achievement—who of us does? But he had the one and only idea. The vast conception alone and all by itself—that's the sea in which infinite geniuses have perished impotently. The maze of detail leading to some vague Purpose—millions of eager but blind souls have been lost and starved in it. It's the Great Thing ahead, with the details at command that matters. The Divine Gift of Combination—" his fingers flickered for a moment on his brow— "our friend Sassoferrato just misses it. Raphael had it. Sir Isaac Newton, Harvey, Pasteur, the chap—the simple sort of fool, just like you and me"—he bowed to Babington—"who built the Parthenon, all had it. . . . Anyhow, I'm glad you like the Eclectics. They were poor devils bursting to deliver a message, and no medium at their command but a worn-out formula. So I love 'em. I'd like to see your Sassoferrato. On the other hand I prefer their successors, the Naturalisti—Caravaggio—he's trying to do things in a new way—but he's one of the fellows that got overwhelmed in his own waves——"

"Pardon me," said Babington, "I've made a study of the post-Raphaelites— As a matter of fact I've published two little books on the subject . . ."

"Read 'em. Read 'em. Read 'em," said Pandolfo, with a smile and an airy wave of his hand.

"Well, my dear sir," said Babington, "you must see that I'm not quite at one with you——"

"But how good! How splendid!" cried Pandolfo, his arms wide apart—his left hand still clutching his empty glass. "Lady Demeter, you're like the lady of the Enchanted Castle. You've brought two knights together—thrown down your glove—your Sassoferrato picture—and we're going to hack each other to pieces about it.——"

The hall door was thrown open and the butler entered heralding vague forms of men and women. Lady Demeter rose and sailed forth in welcome. Pandolfo hooked Babington's arm and swept him away into a far corner of the hall, under the lee of the stately staircase.

"My dear fellow," said he, "in your books you're as right as rain. As right as any professional beggar of questions can be. But there's such a thing as universality. I've got an Andrea Vaccaro—one of the Naturalisti——"

"I'm aware of him," said Babington.

"Well, come and see it. If it explodes all your ideas I'll give it to you."

His compelling good nature was irresistible. Babington allowed himself to be beguiled.

"I confess," said he, "that to me it's a surprise—a most agreeable surprise—that a man whose name is associated with mechanical and utilitarian things should have, well, practically the same hobby as myself."

"Bless your heart," cried Pandolfo, "I've a million hobbies. Now, I should really like you to see my Andrea Vaccaro. Name any day. Whenever you like. Come and lunch. I'll show you lots of things."

Lady Demeter, dispensing tea to her guests, cast an eye into the far corner where the two lions were now conversing with indubitable amiability, and inwardly congratulated herself on her unfailing tact.

Towards the end of the dressing-hour, she entered the room of Paula Field, who had arrived late, and embraced her fondly.

"My dear, with all this menagerie on my hands I haven't had a moment for a word with you. It's too sweet of you to come down and help me."

"With the poor lion who hasn't got a Christian? I hope I'll do."

Paula laughed, teasing and adorable, and glanced for a second into the pier glass before which she stood. It reflected a tall, delicately made woman, with wavy brown hair on a dainty head and a humorous smile behind blue almost violet eyes; a quality of style, in the sense of its application to a poem or a picture. A shimmering silver dress conveyed the impression of great stateliness.

Lady Demeter followed the glance.

"Always perfection," she sighed admiringly. She knew that she herself was the Dressmaker's Despair.

Paula chose to be rueful. "You've seen it before, Clara, and you'll see it again. Still, it is rather nice, isn't it? Well, what about the man? What's his name? Rudolfo?"

"Pandolfo. Sir Victor Pandolfo. You must have heard of him." Lady Demeter's voice grew plaintive.

Paula shook her head. "Sorry, dear."

"He's the greatest inventor of modern times and he's going to take you in to dinner. You see it was this way——"

Hastily she explained her embarrassing situation. Only yesterday had Pandolfo proposed himself, over the telephone, for this week-end. She had invited him for the next one together with a scientific crowd, half the Royal Society, all bulging with brains and other funny things like that, and she thought he would interest them and wake them up a bit. But he wasn't free. So, flustered, at the end of the telephone, she had to tell him to come down. And there he was, putting out the whole of her carefully selected party. Quite out of the picture, as she had told Paula. Why, that very afternoon, she had thought he was going to eat up poor Spencer Babington.

"Oh, he's here, is he?" said Paula, with a little grimace.

Lady Demeter nodded. Yes. Spencer, and George Brendon, the poet and Miss Dragma Winthorne who wrote the improper books, and the Bishop of Dedminster ("Who, I presume, reads them," Paula interjected) and the President of the Board of Trade and the Paraguayan Minister and a charming American singer. All delightful people. And, as far as Paula could gather, into this perfect den of leonine soul-mates, had leaped the disconcerting Pandolfo.

"I had to get another woman, of course. And you were the only one I could think of who could tackle him. And, Paula dear, I knew you wouldn't mind."

"Mind?" laughed Paula. "Don't be silly. When there's a chance of escaping from my stuffy little flat under the shadow of Harrod's stores and coming here, I throw every bit of pride out of the window and myself out of the door into the first taxi."

Lady Demeter drew a deep and buxom breath. "You're always such a dear, Paula. But I did owe you some apology."

"Tell me more about the man Pandolfo."

Lady Demeter became suddenly aware of the poverty of her knowledge. She had been constantly running up against him, in all sort of places, during the season. He had invented something during the war—an application of the tank system to submarines—she was not quite certain. Lady Demeter lived in a golden haze of general misinformation. Anyhow they had given him a K.B.E. And he was an authority on wireless telegraphy. Also, there was something about a new metal that could supersede steel. As far as she knew, it was the Duchess—that dear scatter-brained Lavinia—who had really set him going socially. And then the Daily—she snapped

a finger's invitation to memory—the Daily—anyhow one of the Daily Horrors had begun to boom him—and so——

"And so, what could I do, my dear? I *had* to ask the man down."

Equipped with this vague account of her predestined dinner-partner, Paula Field, a little later, entered the already humming drawing-room. With most of the house-party she was acquainted. Smiles and homage greeted her, as they have ever greeted woman with the gift of beauty and graciousness. Spencer Babington, spying her, gripped the ribbon of his eye-glass and crossing the room came up to her in his dignified way.

"A delightful surprise. Lady Demeter never told me I should meet you."

"Well, I'm here anyhow. You didn't tell me yesterday you were coming."

"My mind, as you know, was occupied with matters far more important."

"All the same, you seem to be glad to see me, and it's very nice of you. I wonder you don't hate the sight of me."

"You little know me," said he.

She was about to reply, when, just behind her a voice, not unpleasant in its resonance, rose above the polite din.

"My dear Bishop—the Comacine masters—I don't believe in 'em. One of the myths of the Middle Ages. Your Cathedral was conceived by an Englishman inspired direct by the Almighty. Never an Italian had anything to do with it."

She turned and beheld a man smiling, sweeping with free gesture bishops and Comacine masters and every one who disagreed with him off the face of the earth. She beheld him as an arresting personality; olive-

skinned; dark and luminously eyed; rugged and pronounced of feature; with a high forehead from which swept back thick bronze hair scrupulously trimmed according to the day's fashion. His only conscious concession to personal idiosyncrasy was the low shirt collar revealing a thick and powerful throat. He might have been a singer. His strong hands and nervous fingers were eloquent in gesture.

Instinctively she asked—although she guessed the answer as soon as the words died from her lips:—

"Who on earth's that?"

"Sir Victor Pandolfo. I've been with him most of the afternoon. Quite an interesting man."

And then came Lady Demeter with a swoop tearing Pandolfo from the Bishop and introducing him to Paula. After a word or two she took off Babington. The two were left alone. Paula was about to make one of the commonplace openings of conversation when she became conscious of his eyes fixed upon her. Then of an embarrassed span of silence. At last she broke it and said with lame challenge:

"Well?"

"You're the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," said he.

She flushed to her hair at the suddenness of the crude tribute. Felt ever so little afraid; also urged by swift instinct of woman on the defensive to ask Clara to find her another dinner-partner. At once, however, civilized habit gripped her. She laughed.

"Your experience must be very limited."

"By no means," said he. "It's as vast as the sun which shines on the just and the unjust, on the plain and the beautiful. I have made observations in all the four quarters of the earth."

"Doubtless, the same observation," said Paula.

He bowed. "You have wit. But let it pass. I'm afraid I've none. I'm a slave of accuracy. If I weren't accurate, the Seven Seas would be paved with the bones of British sailors. You think I paid you an idle and unmannerly compliment."

"The formula's yours," she answered, regaining the weapon of her dignity.

"I beseech you not to believe it. Why should I pay women idle compliments?"

"It's the foolish way of ordinary men," said Paula.

"But good God alive, dear lady, I'm not an ordinary man. What do you take me for?"

"For the man," said Paula, noticing the general surge towards the door, "who is ticked off to take me into dinner. Let us go." She laid a couple of fingers in the crook of his arm. "I hope we shan't quarrel too violently."

"People like you and me can't quarrel. It's a psychological impossibility."

They took their places in the paired procession.

"Why?"

"That's for the little folk," said he. "We're too big."

And so it went on during the conventional intervals of the stately meal. Up to now Paula, a childhood friend of Clara Demeter and a widow of recently reduced fortune, had found a peculiar æsthetic enjoyment, during her visits to Hinsted, in the setting of the old seignorial dining-room. She relived her life passed among such surroundings. She loved the old oak panellings; the majestic Sir Joshuas and Raeburns in their proud gilt frames; the gleam of statuary in the recess of the bay window; the perfect table into which heavy silver and exquisite glass cast their deep reflections as into a pool;

the diamonds and pearls of choicely arrayed women set off, each one, between the dead black and white of men; the panorama of keen human faces; even the mystery of the grey-liveried serving men who floated like ministering and impeccable ghosts around the table. And she loved the luxury of the Sèvres dinner-service and the frothing and curling and bubbling of champagne in her glass. It was her dainty delight to have this same glass replenished a little finger's breadth full, every time the golden necked bottle appeared over her shoulder in the white gloved hand of the ghostly serving-man.

But, to-night, for the most part, her usual enjoyment of things loved and lost, was, as it were, wiped out by a fascinating hatred of her overwhelming partner. Over and over again she turned to the poet on her right, only to listen blankly to his divagations on golf and Monte Carlo systems and the only polish for brown boots and such other topics as form the staple conversation of modern self-respecting poets, while she caught with the back of a maddeningly jealous ear, the sonorous voice of Pandolfo engaged in juicy talk with his left-hand neighbour, the Bishop's wife. She was angry with herself for returning to him with freshly stimulated interest.

He pointed to an unfastened diamond barette in her corsage.

"You'll lose that," said he, "let me see it." She put it in his hand. "Yes. The sort of fastening you see on Japanese jewellery in a Christmas cracker. The world is divided into fools, damn fools and Insurance Companies. They actually insure a thing like that. Do you want to lose it?"

"It's my most precious possession."

"Then I'll contrive a hinge, pin and catch for you.

It'll put me on the track of a modification of my new metal for delicate purposes. They've been carrying on with this sort of foolery since the days of ancient Knossos. I'll send you a model next week. If you like it, I'll fit it on to your brooch." With deft strong fingers he straightened the platinum pin and twisted the catch. "This will last for the time being."

She thanked him, compelled to admiration of his exquisite touch. A jeweller would have done the same work with patent pliers. Civility bade her remark:—

"You mentioned your new metal, Sir Victor?"

"It's going to revolutionize the world," said he. "It will be brighter than burnished silver, untarnishable like platinum, which anyway looks like tin, harder than diamond, unbreakable; a sixteen-inch gun made of it will go on for ever without re-rifling, and the seamstress's finest needle will never blunt or snap."

"What it is called?"

"Ah there, I'm waiting for an inspiration. Already you see I'm your humble servant for life; but give me a name and I'll be your devoted slave for eternity. Have you ever met an inventor before?" he asked suddenly.

"Not to my knowledge."

"Well, now you've met one, what do you think of them?"

"I should say they were quite well-meaning folk," replied Paula.

He laughed. "Also a bit mad, eh? Well, you can't live in a perpetual romance and retain the stately equilibrium of Babington over there. An inventor is a vagabond not only on the high roads of mankind's aspiration, but through the bye-ways of human needs and infirmities over meadows of pleasantness."

"Interesting, yes," she smiled, "but romantic . . . ?"

"When—in the sanctity of your retirement, you wash your hair—tell me—I ask out of curiosity—how do you dry it?"

"If you want to know," she said amused, "my maid connects a little machine with an ordinary electric plug in the wall, and something whirrs hot air round my head. Oh, don't ask me to explain——"

"What's the name of your little machine?"

"The—the—oh something 'Perfecto.' "

"There!" said he. "I suspected it. What could I conceive more romantic than to have the privilege of drying your beautiful hair?"

She fell down, with a laugh, from her high estate.

"No? Really? How funny that you should have invented it. What put such a concession to woman's vanity into your head?"

"I escaped from hideous factories where Moloch commanded that dreadful reeking things should be made dry, dry, dry in five seconds, and flew into a sylvan glade, and threw myself down on a mossy bank by the side of a stream. And water-nymphs crept shyly around me. And I said: 'You are very comely of feature and shapely of form; but your long wet straight hair is decidedly unbecoming.' And one of them replied: 'Tell us how to dry it quickly, for it gives us such a headache to sit in the sun.' I had a bright idea and invited them to Moloch's factory where they could get as dry as Bombay ducks. The usual feminine answer: 'My dear, I've nothing to wear.' So, being a good-natured fellow, I said: 'If you won't go to Moloch, Moloch shall come to you.' And there, my dear lady, you have the romance in a nutshell."

She laughed. "You're a bit of a poet too."

"A bit? A complete one. A maker of things out of dreams. Could you have a better definition?"

"Heaps," replied Paula, who was not to be browbeaten.

"To-morrow, then, I'll challenge you. Definitions are important. The night brings counsel."

Again their respective neighbours claimed them. She turned to her professional poet. The impudence of the man to suggest that she should stay awake all night in order to equip herself with argument against him! She put the question to the poet Brendon who talked in vague discomfort. He was fresh faced, young, British and rather shy; was conscious that the beautiful lady whose name he had not caught, because, in abstraction she had turned her name card maddeningly upside down, took little or no interest in him. He professed himself, ingenuously, to be a very humble person. Whereupon Paula, quick to react, realized her unkind preoccupation and spread her graciousness over him to the end of the dinner.

The ladies rose; Pandolfo swung back her chair.

"You'll get used to me in time," he said with a smile in his bright eyes.

"I hope not," she replied ironically.

CHAPTER III

PAULA could only exchange a few hurried words with her much-engaged hostess.

"Am I off duty, Clara?"

"What a question!"

"I've really been good, and, please, may I play for an hour or two? I assure you he'll be all right. He's quite capable of looking after himself."

Again Lady Demeter proclaimed her a dear. She had set him going. Not that he needed much winding up, after all. Mrs. Winterton (the Bishop's wife) was enchanted with him. Paula could go and play with a free conscience and the meed of her gratitude.

So, when the men came in, and for the rest of the evening, Paula manœuvred avoidance of the overpowering and obviously pursuing man, until she took refuge with Spencer Babington outside, in a corner of the summer-scented terrace.

The next morning, however, Pandolfo found her alone with a book, in the Italian garden. He approached her, hat in hand.

"Dear Lady, in what have I offended?"

She looked up coolly from her page. "I don't know what you mean?"

Said he: "I was dying to talk to you last night. What are the snatches of dinner conversation? A thimbleful of water to a parched man. And you gave me no chance. Was it fair?"

"Why should I give you a chance, as you call it?" making the obvious retort feminine.

He sat down with something of a flourish on the garden seat, by her side.

"Because I'm worth it. I really am. Nobody but I would have dared to tell you—and by you I mean you—Paula Field—forgive my using your Christian name, which I've made it my business to learn—but Paula Field signifies a vital being, whereas Mrs. Field is a polite abstraction—oh yes—" he held up a checking hand, and smiled luminously "—you need not fear. In addressing you, I shall always be abstractly polite. In thinking of you, or alluding to you, I defy you to forbid my concrete conception of you. Miss Kauffmann, who is she? Angelica Kauffmann—and the impersonal lady rends the veil and arises like a rose. My analogy—what have you to say against it?"

"That I'm a very humble woman, without any notoriety, thank goodness, who is known to her general acquaintances as Mrs. Field."

"I'll bet you a million pounds to a penny that you're not." He threw himself back on the seat, which rocked from the impact of his body. "The artistry of your personality makes you Paula Field to everyone who has known you for five minutes, or seen your portrait in the papers. Oh, I know," he said, bending forward, "that by your remark you intended to set me in my proper place. But my proper place is not where you think it is."

Paula, conscious of balance calmly kept, asked:

"Where is it? I should like to know."

He flickered a hand from ground to sky.

"Wherever I will it to be. Circumstances have not placed me. I have placed myself. Year by year, higher and higher. It's a matter of will, of self-appreciation. That's why—a moment ago—I began to tell you something and broke off. . . . Any semi-bred puppy can tell

a commonplace pretty woman that she's the most beautiful thing in the world. But what real man—save me—" he smote his broad chest "—has ever had the audacity to make such an instantaneous declaration to Paula Field?"

"I'll admit," said she, "that you're unique."

"And so you're up against me. I'm not according to pattern. You can't fit me into one pigeon hole as you can Spencer Babington, or another like the dreary prelate of Dedminster, or another like the sex-ridden young woman who writes the awful novels. You shrink into your British shell of defensive armour. But you know very well that inside yourself, your mind, your soul, whatever it is, you are saying, 'Why shouldn't a human being be unique?' And, indeed, where's the crime?"

"It's not a crime, but it may be a discomfort."

He threw back his head and laughed good-humouredly. The infection caught her.

He asked: "Am I forgiven?"

She smiled. It was a golden day with a breeze in it and the shade was most restful, the man's voice pleasant, his attitude flattering. In answer to his question she said:

"I suppose so. At least, you will be if you talk about something else."

"I will talk with you," said he, "on any subject under the sun."

She made a laughing answer and so peace was made between them. She found that his boast was not so thrasonical as it seemed. His mind was stored with a wealth of knowledge coloured by a fervid imagination. With him picturesque and emphatic statement took the place of argument. Paula's feminine wit quickly discerned that the best of him went forth to the accomplished listener. When they rose, to move towards the

house and preparations for luncheon, they were sworn friends. At least, so proclaimed Pandolfo, with a flourish, as they walked along.

For the rest of the visit Paula endured his dominance with half-rueful acknowledgment. He interested her always; at times fascinated her; now and then, also, sent her back curiously shivering. The last sensation she resented, being accustomed to the cool and confident handling of men. Their homage had been hers since girlhood. She had the regal beauty that ensures it. She possessed, too, the common sense and the humour which presented her safe and pleasant conduct. In her own way, she was a man's woman. She had a frank love of the company of men, and, knowing them, walked among them fearlessly. Thus fear of a man, instinctive, feminine, was new and peculiarly disagreeable. It was not that Pandolfo overstepped limits of propriety in speech or action. His first tribute had been his most monstrous declaration. Behind his eyes, when he looked at her, there had been nothing of that with which her woman's equipment had always enabled her to deal. There was nothing, in fact, that could suggest him as a lover, ardent, devout or humble. He was too vehement and masculine to talk the disgusting twaddle of esoteric spiritual relationship. He had proclaimed her, once and for all, as a woman on his own plane of personality. It was splendid arrogance, colossal impudence, anything you like in the way of braggadocio. But there it rested. He had caught her up into the spheres wherein he professed to have his being and implicitly declared his intention of maintaining her there for ever; at any rate, in some such figurative style did she realize her position. She was afraid. And she could not conceive an ordinary, straightforward reason for her fear.

She was an ordinary, straightforward woman, impatient of subtleties. She had lived her life in the major key of love and death and courage. It was the very directness of the man that attracted her and compelled her. There must be some direct reason for her fear.

There was nothing remotely suggestive of the hypnotic about him. She said to herself that he was too vast. Still less was there anything of the vampiric; the quality of the creature who gets hold of you, gradually, remorselessly and sucks your vitality to feed its own thin-blooded necessities. Pood old Spencer—she repudiated instantly the ungenerous thought—was more of that type. This disturbing man made not the shadow of a claim. He was gradually self-sufficing. He gave lavishly of himself; took for granted her acceptance. She said to Clara Demeter:

"He swamps one. I feel like a bit of wood carried down by a river in spate. Of course I like him, my dear. But I like a quiet life better. . . . I'm not going to do any more lion taming for you," she said, after the give and take of talk had necessitated a change of metaphor. "It's too strenuous. Besides there are consequences."

There were, as she, wise prophetess, foretold. He insisted on motoring her to London on the Monday morning. In the first place a crowded train on a sweltering July day was not for a woman of her quality. Secondly, unless she drove with him she would be reckoned among the benighted billions of human beings—all mankind, in fact, save himself and his chauffeur sworn to secrecy—who had no idea of the potentialities of the inner combustion engine. There was also a new adaptation of springs, of cunning shock-absorbers, which made headlong progress over broken flints smoother than a crawl round Brooklands.

"It will please you," said he. "Why deny me the simple satisfaction of giving you pleasure?"

Indeed, what valid reason had she for refusal? A lift for a lone woman in a hospitable car was the most conventional thing in the world. She went. She had to agree that his boastings had not been vain. No gondola on the laziest Venice canals could have advanced with more languorous smoothness.

"Lots of people talk of the great things they're going to do," said he, "I don't until they're done."

Thus began a fascinating yet embarrassing intimacy. A few days afterwards he called on her, having telephoned for an appointment, with the model for the fastening of her barette. He declared it as fast as death, as eager as a child for her admiration. What could she do but entrust her brooch to him? He would yield, this time, to convention, and have the fastener executed in platinum.

"But why?" she asked diffidently. "This new metal of yours is most attractive."

"It isn't perfect," said he. "I aim at perfection. Nothing but that can come out of my hands to be laid at your feet."

Later, he called again, all in a hurry. Lady Demeter and one or two others had promised to lunch with him at his house in Chelsea. Would she come? What day, she asked. It was for her to name it, said he, thereby signifying that Lady Demeter and the others were attendant on her good pleasure. At random, for it was the fag end of the season, she suggested Tuesday. Tuesday should it be.

Meanwhile she collected odds and scraps of information concerning him. Before her meeting him at Hinsted, she had never heard his name; now it seemed to

be familiar to most of her acquaintances. His reputation, she found, ran every gamut, from captivating gentleman to unmannerly boor; from irreproachable idealist to the grossest of evil livers; from genius to charlatan. Details were blurred, save those manifestly extravagant. No one seemed to know whence he had come. Knowledge of his achievement was vague. Some said that all the Admiralty's anti-torpedo appliances were due to his brain; others that he had come forward and grabbed his K.B.E. with the brazen assurance of the thief who, entering a jeweller's shop in broad daylight walks off with a diamond necklace. Worshippers of Mammon, as is their way, said that he rolled in the immense fortune brought to him by his inventions; the evil-tongued and envious, that he staggered on the brink of the adventurer's bankruptcy. One old-fashioned gentleman said darkly: "The man's an enigma."

Paula found at any rate, that his house was one, for all the reflection it afforded of its owner's character. It was as impersonal as a museum; as uninhabited and uninhabitable as the show apartments of a historic mansion. It was richly furnished, in the French style of Louis Seize and Empire. In the rooms hung a small but choice collection of pictures. To his guests he was the perfect cicerone, vaunting the qualities of his pieces, and not without justification.

Said Sir Spencer Babington, especially invited to inspect the Andrea Vaccaro:

"These fellows who talk so much—you always expect to find them tripping. He doesn't trip, confound him."

"Why should you want him to?" she asked.

"I don't like people so overpoweringly Jovian," said he.

This was after lunch. Pandolfo had recommended an 1892 Ayala, deprecating prejudice against midday cham-

pagne. But they would see. They would taste the perfection of light luncheon wines! Babington politely questioned the possibility of champagne surviving thirty years. Pandolfo smiled at him, with uplifted head. "My dear fellow!" said he. His glass was the first to be filled. He smelled and tasted it. He smiled again and waved across the table.

"Yours shall be the first judgment, a quiver of the nose or a wrinkle of the brow, and the bottle shall be poured away into eternity."

Babington smelt and sipped, and dry judge of wine and scrupulously honest according to his lights, bowed approvingly to his host.

"Of a past generation, of course," said Pandolfo. "Fragile but sound. With a lingering perfume—figuratively speaking—like lavender."

"It is truly so," said Babington, though in his heart he damned the cock-sure fellow for being right. "Not robust enough for dinner; but for luncheon exquisite."

Pandolfo turned to Paula. "The doubting Thomas," said he. "That's the tragedy of my life. I've got to convert the Didymites before I can get anything done."

Again had Babington been defeated—over a dish of quails, which he had refused.

"Babington, you horrify me," cried Pandolfo in large protest. "Diplomacy divorced from quails——"

"I'm sorry—but quails——"

"Ordinarily are just quails. I understand. The dreadful protocol. But these are miniature birds of Paradise. The creation is the result of a conference between myself and the chef of a recently discrowned head. Trust me and try."

So Babington, out of courtesy, tasted, and out of epi-

curean gluttony picked the succulent bird to its carcase, and had another.

Food, wine, service had been faultless. The host, the most flashingly gracious to every guest. Yet had Paula the sense of being entertained in a room wherein no one could dwell. Here and there in France and Italy has a stately house been converted into a hotel, the old dining-hall still preserved and swept clear of everything personal, even of haunting ghosts, and all the sweet old household gods that gave it the consecration of human emotions replaced by lifeless ornament. There was no offence against taste. But the room was dead, as though it had been the work of two pale and tired young experts from Bond Street and St. James's Street. And there was the vehement creature by her side enthusiastic over all these possessions. She agreed with the old-fashioned gentleman who had called himself an enigma.

To Babington, who had come prepared to sniff at the Andrea Vaccaro and found it a flawless example of the late Italian master, who had been converted against his will to appreciation of thirty years' old champagne and of a bird which he had hitherto detested, Pandolfo was an overpoweringly Jovian person who had the maddening gift of always being right.

As they drove away, Lady Demeter who offered Paula a lift in her car as far as Hansel Mansions, commended host and lunch.

"But," said she, "the man doesn't seem to have any private life."

Paula laughed. "Dear prim Spencer would harmonize more with that uninhabited drawing-room."

"The house wants a woman, my dear."

"And you're already hiring the Ritz Hotel and won-

dering whether it'll be big enough to hold all the people you're going to ask to the wedding reception."

Lady Demeter called her a most ungrateful woman. In her words Paula detected an unwonted sharp note of seriousness. She broke into remonstrance. Even the most incurable romantic in the world, which was Clara Demeter, could not conceive such a possibility.

"My dear Paula," said Lady Demeter, "short of a physical impossibility such as a gas-lamp running away with an armadillo, there's nothing impossible in this world of different sexes. Look at me, I married Demeter."

"Frank's a dear and a gentleman and he knows that you adore him."

"Quite so. It proves my point. Look at him and look at me. Who would have thought it?"

Paula looked inwardly and smiled. There seemed, indeed, little in common between the little, white, elderly, timid mouse of a man and his florid and opulently endowed lady. Yet her intimate knowledge of them assured her that they were the happiest married couple in the world. Clara, however, in her feminine way, had begged the question. Paula had qualified Lord Demeter as a gentleman, a term of significance. Her delicacy forebore to press the point. She said lightly:

"You're always thinking of marrying me off, Clara, but you won't do it. The state of widowhood isn't at all indecent."

Lady Demeter rested her hand on her friend's knee.

"With a woman like you, it is. It positively is."

A few minutes later, when Paula Field found herself alone in the stuffy drawing-room overshadowed by the red-brick mass of Harrod's Stores, and caught sight of her superb beauty in the mantelpiece mirror, and felt

within herself the pulsations of glorious health and youth, and the stirrings of warm tentacles groping restless, persistent towards something, something rich, something of Life's eternal promise, she caught her breath and turned away, her hand on her bosom. The dear foolish, worldly Clara pierced deeper, perhaps, into human things than she knew.

She ordered tea, to pull herself together, and then went off into another fit of loneliness. The telephone bell clanged horribly on sensitive nerves. She rose and crossed impatiently to the blatant instrument.

"Yes. Yes."

"Darling——" came the voice of Lady Demeter.

And darling was to know that Victor Pandolfo was over head and ears in love with her, and what was she going to do about it?

"Ask him to lunch at your horrid club and poison him," replied Paula, breaking off the connection.

If all women were angels the terrestrial globe would cease to be populated.

She was angry with Clara. Clara, the dearest thing in the world, whom she had known since childhood, who, serene elder girl had mothered her, a gawky thing at school, presumed too much on her position of keeper of the Temporary Den for Lions. Victor Pandolfo was bracketed with Spencer Babington as the last man on earth she would think of marrying. Besides, what ground had Clara for her crude statement? Even supposing the man was in love with her—save for the not wholly unpleasurable worry to which every woman is put in the ridding herself of an unwelcome suitor—what concern was that of hers? For the rest of the day Lady Demeter buzzed about her like a buxom gadfly.

Two mornings afterwards came the brooch, exquisitely

fitted with inescapable platinum pin. Also, not a bouquet, but a bower-ful of roses; and a note:

"The pin for the bosom, the flowers for the feet of the most beautiful woman in the world."

Practically a declaration in form, thought Paula. Whether in good or bad form was another matter.

With a curl of her humorous lips she wrote him the primmest little letter of thanks. He called the next day. She was, literally, not at home. A week passed. Then came a mighty packing-case, with a written line of explanation:

"An offering of first-fruits."

The porter of the mansions had to be summoned with hammer and screw-driver to open the case. Out of straw and other packing emerged a silvery metal casting of Benvenuto Cellini's Perseus holding the Medusa's head. She had seen the original bronze in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence. She had seen, like most other people, reproductions here and there. But never had she seen one in, apparently solid silver. For want of place from which to view it she had it set on her dining-room table. For a while she regarded it perplexedly. A silver statue was an embarrassing gift for modest widow to receive from a stranger; to say nothing of the encumbering discomfort to the said widow's household gods. Yet it was not quite silver. It dawned upon her that it was Pandolfo's boasted new metal. His words were "first fruits." She reasoned rightly that it was the result of his first experiments in the application of his metal to the grand artistic.

The casting had been exquisitely done. Pains almost equal to Benvenuto's historical travail had been bestowed on it. But in this white metal that shone with the dull

hopelessness of burnished pewter, it lacked the mystery of the bronze. The magical lights of silver might have saved its beauty through sheer bravado. This new thing, for all its technical perfection, loomed metallically dull. It was at once so perfect and so impossible. Her heart sank.

He burst in upon her during the afternoon.

"Did you get it? What do you think of it? Months and months, my dear, it has cost me, to say nothing of a small fortune. But I can do all the statuary of the world in it. Once on the market, a hundredth the price of bronze. The art of all the ages"—he held up both arms with hands outstretched—"within reach of the lowliest. For a few shillings, a trifle—and the poorest can fill their homes with imperishable, untarnishable beauty. Bronze, as I've hinted, is expensive. No one can buy bronzes but the rich. The less well off buy plaster casts and stick them on their mantelpieces or in their little gardens and the ears come off and the noses get chipped and the weather and housemaids combine to render them objects of derision. But now, what do you think? Haven't I solved the whole thing? By the way"—he looked around the drawing-room—"where is the Perseus?"

"On my dining table," replied Paula, who forebore to say that it was her one dumping spot.

"Splendid," said he, in his vast manner. "A site of honour. Benvenuto must be flinging you his florid gratitude from Paradise. And I, too, am complimented. It's something to be Benvenuto's translator. Let me see how it looks. Do you mind?"

Smilingly she led the way into her little dining-room; softened by an absurd pity for this vehement child who

took for granted her absorbed interest in his sand-castle. He circled around the statue perfectly lit from the room's northeast window and scanned it with bent brow.

"It's too grey. It's dead. Looks like a corpse. I'll try again and send you another. I told you it was an experiment, didn't I? I'll take it away now."

"You'll do no such thing," said Paula, "I love it."

"I hate to give you anything of myself that isn't perfection," said he.

"I'll keep this anyhow, until the perfect thing comes along," she replied.

They passed into the drawing-room.

"What made you think of statuary in your metal?"

"Heredity," said he, with an air of triumphant challenge. "My father used to hawk a tray of plaster-casts about the streets of London."

CHAPTER IV

Victor Pandolfo drove away from Hansel Mansions with a beaming face. The most beautiful woman in the world had received the shock of his announcement without wincing. That true steel quality of hers. The pure breed! A lesser creature would have gasped. By heavens! she was indeed worth the wearing! She had merely waved towards the dining-room:

"Your father would have joined hands in wonder with Benvenuto."

The adorable graciousness of her! He slapped his thigh, as he rolled up Knightsbridge in his car; he was essentially a man of action.

"The outside world," he had said, "matters to me not the hair on a fly's leg. What I am and whence I came is none of their business. But you must know me as I am."

She had drawn herself up in her glorious and ironical way.

"Will you be so kind as to tell me why?"

"For the most elemental reason that can enter the head of woman."

She had turned, fidgeted a drooping rose deeper into a glass vase. He had taken the other hand hanging limp and undecided, had carried it to his lips with a flourish and marched out. He was conscious of the artistic touch; the eternal canon of restraint. He had left her in the air.

The roar of Knightsbridge and Piccadilly received

him like an applauded actor. The scene had been short, swift, dramatic; holding just the delicious suspense of decision. He rolled down the Haymarket, along the Embankment, City-wards, where he had an appointment with great financial personages. You cannot convert a notoriously Conservative and doubting world to enthusiastic faith in a new metal that will wipe out of human consideration tin, zinc, pewter, nickel, electro-plate, silver and platinum and, above all, steel, without spending vast sums of money in pure and simple cajolery. It was a repulsive psychological fact of modernity. Faith had to be bought in cash-payment. He could prove to Admiralties, Air Ministries, Ordnance Branches, Societies Royal, Metallurgical, Mineralogical, Chemical, Institutions of Civil and Mechanical and Electric Engineers, Institutes of Iron and Steel, vast corporations blowing futile furnaces the length and breadth of the land, that his new metal was the greatest gift to man since Prometheus brought down fire from heaven. It was a fact carrying conviction to elementary human intelligence; as little open to dispute as the superiority of an aëroplane over a bullock-cart as a means of locomotion. But you can prove things to people until you are blue in the face. They yield to every argument; they are convinced; and then you go away and something diabolical arises within them which calls you a liar. All of which was paradoxical and heart-breaking. Oh for the old ages of faith! Jonah goes to Nineveh with his whale story and the king believes him at once and sees to it that the Ninevites put themselves to amazing personal discomfort. Not an intellectual effort is attempted by the whole community. It was faith. Nowadays, nothing less than cinematographic advertisements could induce people to believe in Jonah; and in order to convince the govern-

ment he would have to turn himself into a limited company with a well paid up capital behind him. Of course, Jonah was rather a dismal fellow, prophesying woe; so far the analogy did not hold good. But at any rate, he was a Man with a Message, just like Pandolfo. In the days of Nineveh he would only have had to deliver it and be acclaimed as public benefactor from palace roof to gutter, and the King would have thrown open his Treasure House and told him to help himself. Now he had to go grubbing for pence in the City of London. Pandolfo hated the City. It always wanted to see the channel of return for its money scoured out through social life. He had been known to describe it as a soulless ganglion of wealth.

At their last meeting the gang of exploiters, directors of joint-stock banks and other large and granite-headed corporations, had worried him to death because he had not found a suitable name for his new metal. Provisionally he had called it Acieto. One conspirator had said that the word suggested a patent food; another, a parlour-game.

"Call it after me, its inventor, its creator," he had cried. "Pandolphum—with a 'ph'—or Dolphinium." The objection was raised that it sounded like a flower.

To the mercilessness of these unimaginative folk was he now going again to surrender himself. If he had rolled through Piccadilly amid applause, he entered the City to be greeted with silent derision. He did not fear the supplementary report of the expert metallurgist appointed by his tentative syndicate. The rule of thumb dullard had only to state an accumulation of dry scientific facts. He detested, though felt no alarm at, the prospect of cross-examination on the sordid vulgarities of commercial profit. His main worry proceeded from

the continued failure of his inventive faculty in the matter of nomenclature.

His car drew up at the block of buildings wherein lay the office of interview. He walked briskly to the lift. Ascending he glanced at his watch. He drew a breath of dismay. He, Victor Pandolfo, who prided himself on being the only punctual man in England, was five minutes late for his appointment. It was all Paula's fault. Had she not, in some witch manner, compelled him to his *beau geste* of declaration, he would have left her five minutes earlier. It flashed idiotically through his head to say: "Gentlemen, my apologies; I was detained by the most beautiful woman in the world. Paula. The one and only Paula . . ."

Suddenly he smote palm violently with fist and cried: "My God!"

The astonished lift-boy thought him mad and missed the floor and went on mounting until Pandolfo, conscious of Empyræan flight, bade him descend.

He marched into the temporary board-room, waved hands both in greeting and in command of attention.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have a name for the new metal. I decline to listen to a whisper of discussion. It is called Paulinium."

By a series of such dominant strokes of self-assertion had he succeeded in life. Over and over again had come crises in which the sole means of self-preservation was a conqueror's disregard of lesser men. The instinct had saved him, in his obscure childhood, from the absorption in the quagmire of Saffron Hill, where he was born and where his father, vendor of plaster of Paris Venuses and Apollos, had his malodorous habitation in the midst of the Italian colony of organ-grinders, waiters in lamentable

restaurants, and various banditti, who eked out a precarious livelihood by knifing those who disagreed with them on questions of taste.

His father, Angelo Pandolfo, was a dreaming fellow, as mild as his name. He had come from Naples as a boy to find fortune in the City of Golden Wealth, as washer-up in a relative's Ristorante in a mildewed corner of Soho. He was slim and beautiful, with dim longings within him towards an æsthetic higher in scale than the perfume of stale cabbage, garlic, burnt fat and cheap game hovering on the verge of sanitary condemnation. A few pence a week made him member of a dreadful club, in which he spent the scanty hours of his leisure. There, occasionally, he would see enthroned in the mightiest seat, the splendid Emmanuele Bolla, President, Patron, Magnifico, Directing Deity of the club. He was the great man, the colossal artist, celebrated throughout the length and breadth of the land. His fame was legendary. He had vast studios, in which was set out in bewildering profusion, the statuary of all the ages. Did King or Emperor yearn for a copy, the same as the original, of some statue in the Museum of Naples or the Vatican, he went in person to Emmanuele Bolla, who with his mystical smile satisfied that King or Emperor's heart's desire. He wore a heavy gold ring with a devil of a diamond on his fat little finger. From the rest of his obese person he oozed opulence. He drank gin and water.

It happened one evening that the sweep of a gesticulating hand sent the half-emptied glass across the room. Young Angelo was one of the company who darted for it, but it was he who retrieved it and handed it back, like a consecrated goblet, to the great man. Emmanuele Bolla, a patriot in his way, was struck by the lithe and handsome grace of the young Neapolitan. He deigned

to enter into conversation, learned the boy's lowly trade and his high ambition. His shrewd business mind caught opportunity by its curly black hair. Here to his hand was the ideal peripatetic vendor of his wares. He employed many, mainly to whose salesmanship he owed his comfortable paunch, his diamond ring, and his position in the Club of United Italy. But with this young man could none of them compare. Here was one who could soften the heart, and wheedle the pocket out of the sourest of elderly English virgins. On the spot he offered him the position; so much a week; so much commission on sales. On the spot Angelo accepted. The next morning he shook from his hands the grease of the awful kitchen, and hied him to the factory of plaster casts. He stood on the threshold of the dilapidated factory and beheld the interior as a Palace of Enchantment. A myriad little white gleaming things of beauty met his eye and instantly ministered to the satisfaction of his poor hungering soul.

"My little son," said the great Emmanuele, dragging him in by his coat collar, "before you sell you must know what you sell. This trade demands intelligence, love, and unscrupulousness. I give you a week to develop these qualities. If at the end——" the wave of a bediamonded hand towards the door completed the sentence.

Thus did Angelo Pandolfo begin his fascinating though not over-lucrative career. He learned with quick brain the formal history of his daily tray of little images; his inarticulate artistic soul loved them for their beauty; it was on the quasi-dishonest, commercial side that he failed. He had his minimum price fixed by Bolla. Below that, common-sense compelled him not to descend. But the maximum was at the command of his own engaging personality. Angelo, loving his images and swept away by any enthusiasm manifested by a would-be pur-

chaser, seldom advanced much beyond his minimum. Yet he sold well and satisfied his patron.

The vendors had their districts. In the course of time and of accident—his predecessor having been put in gaol for stealing overcoats from the hall of a house into which he had been admitted—he was promoted to Bloomsbury, which at that period was the home of the simple, fat, and well-to-do. There were great square, broad thoroughfares to walk in, easy folk to accost. Angelo translated (in episcopal terms) from the vulgar scurry of Islington, expanded his chest with the air of one at last entering into his kingdom. Only those who have struggled upwards through stereotyped grades can appreciate the magic thrill of promotion. The young Neapolitan, possibly one of the last of his trade in London, strode or lounged or loafed—to a Neapolitan it is all one—around the Bloomsbury Squares, with the grace of a young god. Areas serving for the ascent, descent, or congregating of maids were not unappreciative.

There was one, Susan Cookson, a housemaid in Russell Square, who bought from him a cast of the Boy with the Thorn, which she stuck on the mantelpiece of her little back-attic bedroom, between the faded photographs of her dead father and mother. She was a comely, serious and thoughtful orphan. Her thoughtfulness suggested a resemblance between the exquisite boy of the cast and the young vendor. Her comeliness, after a few subsequent meetings with Angelo at the top of the area steps, made it manifest to her that she was beloved for its sweet sake. Her seriousness, after much interviewing and love-making, she eventually threw to the winds. She was the beautiful, dreamy, one and only Angelo's, and he was hers. It was a matter of sweet and honest love. This and that were what he could offer her, said he, conducting

her to his bare room in Saffron Hill. And this and that, she cried with her woman's wisdom, could she do for her poor helpless Angelo, and make the bleak place a bower of delight.

So they married. A child was born whom they christened Vittore. His early childhood was passed among the cheery and not often washed progeny of the Hill. Angelo, promoted to a handcart and ambitious products of the studio, would take the small Vittore with him on fine summer days, to teach him, as he said, the business. His other joke was to point him out to possible customers as the only image not for sale. And thus, on the child's first waking conception of the world dawned as a vague alien place peopled, intimately, with dazzling little white forms.

In the course of time the eminent artist Emmanuele Bolla took the faithful vendor from the road and established him in the factory. For he had prospered and been able to improve the moulding of his casts and to acquire a clientele of a higher class than that touched by itineracy. Angelo became head salesman. He moved from Saffron Hill to luxurious rooms (in the plural) above a greengrocer's shop in Greek Street, Soho. Inhabitant of these realms of splendour, the six year old Vittore was chastised for undue familiarity with an organ-grinder's monkey who had been housemate and bosom friend a few months before.

All his life Victor Pandolfo remembered that day, when lying down resentful, sore, and necessarily prone, the first Great Conception stirred his spirit. A Giacomo (such was the monkey's name) was essential to his existence. If he could not hold communion with a living one, human injustice and unreason could not forbid his cherishing a counterfeit presentment. He was aware that such things could be bought in toyshops; but they cost money. He

had a vague consciousness also, that they would prove unsatisfying to his needs, being but soulless parodies of Giacomo. The structure, features, fur of Giacomo were burnt into his brain. For some days he went about obsessed with the idea of creation; stored in a hiding-hole behind his bed a magpie's hoard of street and studio gleanings—bits of rabbit fur, tarred rope, rags, needles, thread, a stump of red pencil, a rusty pair of scissors (treasure of treasures) found amid the rubbish of the kitchen drawer, and two buttons surreptitiously torn from a soiled shirt of his father's, which, when blackened from the family inkbottle would do for eyes. And so, in secrecy, was the new Giacomo constructed, the tarred rope providing the magnificent finish of a tail.

"Where in the world did you get that thing from?" asked his mother one day, her immediate maternal devotion having been diverted from him to the needs of a sickly baby sister.

"I made it," he cried defiant, clutching the abortion to his breast.

"You're a funny boy," said his mother placidly.

"Funny?" cried his father. "But son of mine, let me see." He held up Giacomo II and gazed at it in rapt admiration. "Funny? He is an artist, a creator. You shall come with me to-morrow, Vittore, to the studio and show it to the *padrone*."

That was the childish beginning of things. He had discovered in himself the gift of making; of adapting commonplace means to extraordinary ends. He was not a creative artist, as Angelo fondly proclaimed. It had been the material form and not the artistic semblance of the monkey with which he had been intensely concerned. His father, a simple and adoring person, and through his very simplicity a great trial to a happy and efficient wife,

gave him a couple of white mice in a cardboard box. Susan saw the palatial apartment in Greek Street overrun with white mice. The infant Vittore allayed her fears by constructing a cage, the wiring for which, inclusive of many ladders and rings he obtained from the refuse soda-water bottle corks at a neighbouring restaurant. His mind worked towards the practical, although queer yearnings of his soul were satisfied when Angelo allowed him to wander at will through the great gloomy shed stacked with the gleaming effigies of the sculptured masterpieces of all time.

Vittore went to a Board-school. The Italian name evoked the mockery of his school-mates. He was sturdy and as English as you please. Had not Angelo, at Susan's instigation, gone through the formality of naturalization? Having inflicted on a small scorner an unpleasant facial disfigurement of mingled blood and tears, he announced that henceforward his name was Victor. It conveyed a good sound English meaning. Coming home with gladiatorial traces on his knuckles which he was careful not to rub off, he defeated his father in vainglorious argument.

"At any rate," said he to Susan, "Victor is our mother Latin."

"So long as he doesn't go and get knocked about by horrid big boys, I don't care what he calls himself," said Susan, thus veiling her ignorance of what, in the name of Italian imagedom, mother Latin might be.

The young Victor Pandolfo, being a youth of keen intelligence, walked through the dullard school like an angel of light. At the end of a school year he came home groaning triumphantly beneath a load of prizes. He experienced his first thrill of self-assertive power, when once, his mother having expressed a desire—unattainable as that of the moth for the star—for a "flinger"—namely

a necklet of fur thrown twice round the neck, with depending ends—he sold his prize volumes (having previously stored their message in his memory) and purchased, with the proceeds, the coveted strip of dyed rabbit skin. He was fourteen.

"Mother," said he, "here is your flinger. Whatever you want, that father can't give you, come to me for it."

She wept and kissed him and even at that time, half believed him. He was an amazing boy. She could not find it in her heart to reprove his boasting. The vivid little wretch never bragged of that which he could not achieve.

"This gas bill is half of last quarter's," said Angelo one day. "And it's the winter quarter. How does it happen?"

"You only have to tap the main," said young Victor, who, unconfessed to mortals, had discovered enormous interest in the convolution of gas-pipes, and by simple, yet secret, boring and soldering, had almost arrived at the solution of the problem of free gas-supply. Airily he explained his process.

"The wonder! The miracle!" cried Angelo, casting hands to heaven.

"But when it's found out, Angelo, you'll go to prison," said Susan.

The ardour of father and son was damped.

"Figlio mio," said Angelo—in intensive moments, such as this, when he realized the horrible danger which he ran, he reverted to his native tongue—"I know you're a clever boy, the delight of my existence, and I see in your genius the prop of my old age; but, for the love of God, go at once and disconnect all that apparatus that will bring into contact with the police an honest man who has only once had to do with them, and that was when I hit

a man hard for plucking one of my statues from my tray —it was a Venus de Medici—and throwing it at the Lord Mayor's Show. He was drunk and I was sober. The policeman decided in my favour and took him away. But it was a very unpleasant experience, for I had to give evidence and a red-faced man in a wig accused me of being a merchant of pornography. Ah no! My son, undo, at this moment, all that you have done——"

Thus did he receive during his boyhood encouragement of invention and inculcation of virtue. From the Board-school he went, with a scholarship, to a Technical College. Thence to the Royal School of Mines. Meanwhile, Emmanuele Bolla, growing more obese and idle, Angelo became manager of the studio, and the family moved from Greek Street, Soho, to a little house in the neighbourhood of Walham Green which for years had been the queer West End of Mrs. Pandolfo's social aspirations. Young Pandolfo, prize student once more, left the School of Mines with flying colours and immediately found a position with a firm of metallurgists. Whereupon Angelo, as though of joy at seeing his son launched on the flood of success, incontinently died.

On the dreary journey to Fulham cemetery, Susan declared her intention of joining her husband as quickly as possible.

"Before you do that, mother," said Victor, "you'll be riding in your own carriage."

"Who's to give it me?" asked the despondent widow.

"I will," said Victor.

He kept his word, though it took him some years to do it. And then he gave her a neat motor-car with a liveried chauffeur who used to touch his cap as she issued from the funny little red-brick Walham Green villa where she insisted on living for the remainder of her days.

"I'm going to be a great man," he would assure her. "I'm going to invent machines that will turn this topsy-turvy old world down-side up again. I'm beginning to make my fortune. You must live in a style befitting Victor Pandolfo's mother."

But she maintained her quiet woman's inflexibility. She was proud of her son, but she would continue to live in the style befitting Angelo Pandolfo's wife.

"If I didn't know that I derived all my strength of character from you," said he, "I should call you an obstinate old woman."

He had to content himself with filling her house with labour-saving gadgets of his own invention. When she died he gave her the most superb funeral that local undertaking talent could devise. The hearse and horses moved in an impenetrable cloud of plumes and half Covent Garden covered the coffin.

"She never dreamed, poor dear," said he, to his one co-mourner, an elderly nondescript who had succeeded his father as manager at Bolla's, "she never dreamed that she would have such a funeral."

Evidently he thought of her as looking down on him with gratitude, from whatever sphere she inhabited in the Other World.

He passed onward through life, a man of big impulses, swift decisions and essential vanities. He postured—it was his nature—like a charlatan, trumpeting the incredible; and yet, so calculated was his belief in himself that act seldom belied promise. He lived lonely, for his fellows feared his young and eager dominance. What did it concern an ignorant lay world that his Electric Coupling would reduce all such other devices to the leaden scrap-heap? It did, as a matter of fact; and his patent brought him in considerable money, so that he emerged from the

dingy obscurity of Westminster purlieus into the blaze of a splendid office in Victoria Street. But no one would regard him as a benefactor to the human race. Only those to whom electric couplings were a matter of vital concern ran the gamut of interest; disgust—this quack of the fair again; compelled and annoyed attention; sniffing distrust; a damn-the-fellow-there-may-be-something-in-it attitude; a realization of indubitability on paper; and so on until demonstration of a working model evoked their grudging enthusiasm. But to other human beings on whom he yearned to shower the benefits of Electric Couplings, he was but a thunderstorm from which it behoved the prudent to take refuge.

It was in about this period—his early thirties—that he swept up unto himself a wife. His restless mind already on the track of the new metal, he went out to Brazil. A mechanical inventor by instinct, by training he was a metallurgist. There were mines and workings that he must visit. On the homeward voyage he met a timid little English governess, unable to cope with the insolence of wealth, who was returning in disgrace and poverty. She had everything that is conceivable in pink and white English prettiness. Pandolfo, hearing her pathetic little story, waved indignant arms and swore that, though she might land penniless at Southampton, he would see to her installation at least in a ducal household. His Jovianism overpowered her. She listened bemused to his lyrics of patent rotary pumps and electric couplings and his epics of new metals that would revolutionize the world. She thought him God's Great Wonder and, poor child, was too ingenuous to conceal her thoughts. He caught her up, fair and flowerlike thing, and saturated her with his tremendous personality. As soon as was possible, after his landing at Southampton, he married his Emily.

After less than a year of dazed apotheosis she died of a still-born babe. Every fable springs from the grain of immortal birth. Even that of Semele. The only thing to spoil this modern application of it was the non-survival of a modern Dionysus.

Pandolfo went about with wideflung arms hurling the everlasting Why? at gods and men. No answer being vouchsafed, he became confirmed in a poor opinion of both categories of beings and sank deeper into his own sympathetic depths. Other women had flitted through his robust life, some in helter-skelter fear, others with heads turned back in lingering fascination. They remained but as pale ghosts in his memory. The tumultuous fierceness of the war confronted him and he plunged into the welter, body and brains. He served, not without distinction, in the Navy; and he had not boasted idly of his torpedo-detection device which, adopted by the Admiralty and distributed throughout the British shipping, had undoubtedly saved thousands of lives. The Government, which, in spite of futile sarcasm, used as few razors to cut butter as possible, plucked him from the perfectly congenial occupation of pitting himself against elemental forces as second in command of a destroyer, and set him down to scientific work in Whitehall.

When the war was over, they rewarded him with a knighthood of the British Empire. The happiest hours of his life were passed at the first subsequent public function when he moved among the mighty of the land with the purple ribbon, cross dependent, round his neck. He was a fine, distinguished figure of a man and attracted notice. He shook distinguished persons, men and women, by the hand. The Great World was his friend. He longed to tell it that once his only friend in the world —great in another significance—was an organ grinder's

monkey in the unsavoury slums of Saffron Hill. He exulted. *Io son io.* He was he himself; once carried round the Bloomsbury Squares, enveloped in dubious blankets on a handbarrow laden with plaster casts and wheeled by the humble, smiling, future-disregarding Neapolitan that was his father; and now Sir Victor Pandolfo, K.B.E., with a purple ribbon distinguishing his shirt-front, and—giddy climax—presented to naval Royalty, who greeted him with a "We all owe you a debt of gratitude"; and then, in the course of the few minutes conversation remarked: "I'd give anything to have an inventor's brain like yours." Pandolfo himself would have given anything to be able to tell him the story of his first invention. The fervid Angelo impelled; the calm and foreseeing Susan restrained.

Coming into the great world, he realized the interest excited by his sudden leap from obscurity. Whispers of legends hinted in his ear, fostered his sense of the romantic. He had dropped from the clouds, a presumable demi-god. Why undeceive these wondering and incredulous folk? To no mortal creature did he reveal the secret of his birth or even his less remote antecedents.

It was only when Paula Field stood before him at Lady Demeter's, in her brown and silver majesty, and he knew, in a flash, that she was the only woman in the universe worth his while to conquer, that his shrewd Italian brain registered the conviction that Truth, flung like a javelin, at the right moment, was the only sure weapon.

He rolled away from his meeting in the City to his house in Chelsea, smiling like the Conqueror of his soul's convictions. He had imposed, without question, the name Paulinium upon his syndicate; their wealth was behind him. The works in Bermondsey, across the river, at

present languishing for lack of funds, could now go full-time ahead. In a day or two the prospectus of the new company would be issued. There would be a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand shares cast at her feet. His thoughts ran:

"Accept this and immortality from Victor Pandolfo, who is the great Pandolfo, only because his father sold plaster of Paris images in the streets of London."

And again:

"*Io son io.* I am I. And, by God, she knows it."

CHAPTER V

THE next day brought two new incidents into the life of Paula Field. First there came a couple of men, sent by Sir Victor to fetch away the Perseus, which, in the meanwhile, with the aid of the porter of the mansions, she had fitted into a dark corner of her dining-room. Out of the accusing glare of the full north-east light it comported itself with attractive decency of sheen. Willingly she bade the men enter with their new packing-case, but the moment their hands touched the statue, she experienced a queer revulsion of feeling.

"No. I've changed my mind," she declared. "Tell Sir Victor I'll keep it."

The spokesman said in rueful perplexity:

"Sir Victor's orders, madam. . . ."

"Sir Victor's orders must give way before my wishes." She smiled pleasantly. "You may tell him so from me. Or, if you'd rather not, I'll write it down for you."

"A kind of note would be more satisfactory for us, madam."

"Sir Victor is somewhat—arbitrary?"

The man laughed, yielding to her graciousness and made a gesture of assent. She scribbled the identic words of the message on a sheet of paper torn from the telephone block and sealed it in an envelope. He apologized for putting her to inconvenience.

"If his orders are carried out, there's no better employer in England than Sir Victor. But if they're not, there's trouble."

Alone, she immediately set herself to wonder why on

earth she had kept the Perseus. Although it looked rather nice in its gloomy recess, she had been moved by no impulse of acquisitiveness. Indeed, for the last twenty hours she had been reviling it as a white elephant of obscure parentage, thereby identifying it with its maker, the son of an itinerant vendor of plaster of Paris images. No self-proclaimed suitor can throw such a bombshell of an announcement at the feet of a high-born lady without inspiring her, if not with scorn, at least with perturbation. Instinct, in this case the dictate of tradition, counsels the gathering of skirts together and flight from danger. But a woman of the modern world distrusts instinct. Her future relations with Pandolfo were the subject of cold and clear resolutions. During her talk in the car with Clara Demeter, hadn't she put her finger on the exact point of differentiation between him and Spencer Babington? His brutal revelation of ancestry had confirmed her diagnosis. She felt anger at having allowed herself to slip, even as little as she had done, out of her own hands.

He was a self-made man. That was the simple word of his enigma. More betoken, he had made himself rather badly; an essential or two omitted; just as he had made his Chelsea wonder-house badly; just as he had made badly the metal of the otherwise perfect statue of Perseus. In all three, man, house, and statue, there was undeniable greatness of conception; but there was failure of execution. The little more and the little less, etc., of Browning. She had been faced by the puzzle of crudity. Lo! the solution. Being a woman of imaginative temperament she almost saw the simple, grinning Angelo in the flesh.

"Please ma'am, Sir Victor Pandolfo has sent some men to take away the statue."

So had her maid announced. She had started up with a sincere "Thank goodness!" and two minutes afterwards had occurred this preposterous right-about-turn of her impulses.

The statue was there, the messengers had gone, and as compromising a scrap of paper as ever woman addressed to man was on its way to Pandolfo. But that the Perseus was too heavy to lift and, could she have lifted it, that it would have possibly slain innocent people on the pavement below, there came a moment when she could have thrown it out of window.

Why had she kept it? At first, she told herself, out of sheer soft-heartedness. He had spent on it so much of his enthusiasm, so much of himself. To have returned it without protest, would have been her acquiescence in his failure, a bleak discouragement. Then came the cold douche of "Sir Victor's orders." She rebelled against the orders of any man. Her words to the foreman were but humorous protest. When written they were both a defiance and an invitation. Almost a childish you-can't-catch-me sort of cry. Even worse; a suggestion of the mythological lady fleeing, with backward glance, through bracken and undergrowth.

She pursued her day's avocations under a cloud of annoyance at its first incident. The second was the receipt of a hand-delivered letter containing Pandolfo's card, and a cutting from the City news of an evening paper.

"We learn that a powerful syndicate has been formed to put upon the metal market the new alloy discovered by Sir Victor Pandolfo, the great inventor. Rumours of this have reached us for some time past. Now it has materialized under the name of Paulinium. . . ."

The word was underlined in pencil. She felt a shock of outrage; then a maddening consciousness of impotence.

To injunct him privately or publicly would be ridiculous. It was as good a name for a metal as any other, Aluminium, Rubidium, Rhodium. . . . Should she grow vehement, he had but blandly to retort that she had no copyright in the name borne by the austere Apostle.

After all, crude or not, it was a compliment, a tribute; an identification of herself with a great conception of the human mind. Paula secretly gloried in being one of the few women in the world endowed with a sense of justice. She must give the devil—this devil of a Pandolfo—his due. All the same, the situation was complicated and disconcerting; tinged too with an element of peril. What should she do? Too proud, and also too conscious of the absurd, to seek advice, she did nothing.

A couple of days afterwards came a bushel of flowers, "With humble gratitude to Egeria."

"Who brought it?"

"Sir Victor's chauffeur, madam."

"Is he there now?"

"Oh no, madam."

That is the worst of these lightning times. In old days of spacious leisure, the messenger would have been refreshing himself after his journey, in kitchen or buttery. The chatelaine would have swept in, cast the bouquet on the floor, with a "Take these back to your master," and swept out with a majestic swirl of velvet train. But nowadays what could a lady do? To wrap them up in brown paper and return them by parcel post was a proceeding lacking in dignity. Of course, she could tell Simkin, her maid, to do with them what she willed; and she could write curtly to Pandolfo to bid him cease sending gifts to an unresponsive recipient. Perhaps, that would be the best course; to finish with the man once and for all. She sat down at her writing desk, drew a sheet

of paper before her and took up her pet fountain pen. It scratched blank, needing refilling. Its deputy proved itself equally dry. She reached for the ink-bottle. It was empty. It is only the lonely (men as well as women) who are suddenly plunged into circumstances of such petty and grotesque desperation. She rose and rang the bell. On her way from the door she passed the vast paper cone of roses. Something caught her senses. She deliberated in front of them, and, according to Mr. Addison's adage, she was lost. Compelled, she bent her face to the mass of just opening faint orange blooms—she recognized them—Madame Ravary—and drank in the exquisite perfume of the old tea rose; the scent that God decreed when He first planted a garden; the fragrance of girlhood's thoughts; the odour of remembered promises of long ago.

When the maid entered, she bade her fill the ink-bottle. When the maid returned, with ink-bottle filled, she disregarded the satisfaction of her requirements. Instead, she gave new orders to set out in the pantry such vases as would be necessary for the arrangement of the roses.

And all through the drying up of the springs of a fountain pen! *Ce que c'est que de nous!* What are we! If we weren't all, men, women, and children, the sport of circumstance, we might be spared much suffering; but after all, we should miss the whole delicious fun of life.

A respectable bachelor, at a seaside resort, dives innocently from a spring-board. Arising from the depths, he bumps his head against the body of a perfectly respectable young female swimmer. Apologies, laughter, acquaintance, love, marriage: two destinies and that of untold generations settled by that sub-aquam and fortuitous bump. Looking at life from another angle, did not that dismal, unhumorous dog, Arthur Schopenhauer, say

that, if the propagation of the species was a matter of pure reason, the human race would cease to exist?

She refilled her pen and sat down and wrote Pandolfo a correct little note of thanks for the flowers, in which she expressed the hopes that the choice of her name for his metal would not bring it ill-luck and that they would meet some time in the autumn when everybody was back again in town.

The very next day, joining a luncheon party at the Carlton, she came upon him in the lounge in eager talk with her hostess.

"Fate wills us to meet before the autumn," he laughed. "When are you flying?"

"In a day or two."

"And whither?"

"First on a round of visits and then,"—vaguely—"abroad somewhere."

He drew her imperceptibly a foot or two away from the standing group of guests.

"Why try to hide from me?"

She flushed angrily and met bantering eyes. "I haven't the remotest intention of doing so."

She was about to turn when he laid a light detaining touch on her arm.

"Before you go, let me tell you how gracious it was of you to keep the Perseus. I sent for it, I know; but I should have been hurt if you had let it go."

The appeal was so human and childish that once more she forgave him.

"I'm on the track of the real silver quality for that sort of thing," said he. "I'll get it, never fear. Failure in your eyes is like a whip of scorpions. I was in my laboratory till four o'clock this morning."

"Where is your laboratory?" she asked.

"Chelsea. The back of the house. That's where I live most of the time. Which reminds me. Our hostess has been—shall I say—importuning me to take her over my Bermondsey works. I'll accede on one condition. Come with her." Before she spoke, he swept aside her conjectured protest. "Don't say you haven't the time before you leave London. The more your occupation, the more your real leisure. Fix day and hour. What are you doing to-morrow at three?" He waited for a second, then flashed. "Nothing. Of course you're doing nothing."

He strode to his hostess. "Mrs. Deverill, Mrs. Field and I have fixed up a Bermondsey visit to-morrow afternoon on condition of your joining us."

"I should love to," said Mrs. Deverill.

Paula talked abstractedly to her neighbours at luncheon, Pandolfo being far away. Now and again diagonally across the table she caught his glance and secret smile. Whatever else he might be, his heavily featured face, so mobile in expression, his broad brow, and his bright dark eyes proclaimed him a personality compared with whom all the other men around the table were conventional dummies. Against her will she found herself returning the secret smile of mutual confidence.

The next afternoon Pandolfo's car whirled her across the river, through a few dreadful streets and deposited her at the gate of the dingy yellow brick building that was the factory. He was waiting for her at the door. He crossed the waggon-beaten strip of ground between factory and gate and helped her out of the car.

Fate was again kind to him, he declared. That very minute, less than a minute ago, Mrs. Deverill had cried

off the engagement. Important business. Probably bridge. He showered benedictions on the little lady's general irresponsibility. He would have the tutelary goddess of the establishment all to himself.

Paula laughed. "Do you think an old modern widow woman like me needs a chaperon?"

"Would you have come if I hadn't held out the bait of the other lady?" He halted, and with outstretched arm pointed an accusing finger. "Honest?"

"Perhaps I shouldn't," she admitted.

Her frankness delighted him. He touched her elbow to aid her up the steps.

"This is all in miniature. A factory of experiment. The real factory, in the Midlands, will cover many acres. In a few years it will be the biggest metal-works on earth."

"This is enormous enough for me," said Paula, standing on the threshold of the vast, gloomy shed and looking into it as into a suddenly disclosed new world.

It whirred with machinery and the flap of great leather bands; it clattered with the noise of hammers; it was alive with grimy men and women doing ordered work at benches; it reeked with the acrid odour given out from the mouths of earthenware retorts and from the surface of molten metal which men pulled about with clippers and flattened out between the rollers of steel machines. From the side of one retort ran a fiery stream into the mouth of another.

To this Pandolfo dragged her the length of the factory through busy rows of benches.

"Just in time. Watch. It's my application of the Bessemer process."

As he spoke, a faint amethistine haze hovered over the

mouth of the receiving retort. An intent, bespectacled man in a linen blouse held up his hand. The feeding stream grew thinner and suddenly ceased and the haze grew into a lambent topaz glow.

"How lovely!" cried Paula.

"Isn't it? It's the nearest we've got as yet." Pandolfo in excitement left her to clutch the arm of the bloused man. They talked unintelligibly, by her side, of pressures and temperatures and unknown substances. Presently he turned to her. "The vapour should be clear pale gold. I get it in the perfect appliances of my laboratory. The problem is perfection on the great scale. The conversion of the ideal into terms of the real. You understand?"

"Philosophically I do," Paula smiled. "But scientifically I'm lost. All I can gather is that you're boiling something in this, you pour a boiling something else into it until you get a pretty light."

He threw up his hands in admiration of her deductions. "Of course. That's all there is to it. Except the result. Look."

Two workmen standing below opened the vent of the retort, and the stream of metal flowed from a funnel into a tank.

"That," said he, "is Paulinium. Your metal. Your very own. If you'll give me a couple of hours I'll tell you the secret."

"I shouldn't be a bit the wiser."

He insisted. "You've got to be the wiser! Your life's going to be the history of Paulinium. You mayn't think it, but it is." He swept her away, in his vehement fashion, before she could formulate an indignant answer. "There are all kinds of other things I must show you. This has yet to cool and then go through many tests.

The microscope among others. Here's the metal being worked."

They halted in front of a red-hot mass which a steel cutting machine was shaving, as though it were cheese, into some sort of cylinder. He explained, going flamboyantly into details, until her unmechanical brain was benumbed. All she could gather was that here, in this side of the vast, grimy, clattering, suffocating, whirring phantasmagoria of a shed, were parts of a car being constructed entirely of the new metal instead of steel. She heard him vaguely amid the din in the burnt air, as in a dream.

"The first of its kind—all Paulinium—engine my own invention—same as the car in which I drove you down from Hinsted—Remember? My patent. The Rolls-Royce people and the Daimlers and Fords will all be sitting up and begging for Paulinium. New idea, too, in springs. I've designed a body which will be unique for I shall tear up the drawings and specifications—and when the chassis is finished and the engine tested, I'll clap it on—and it shall be yours. It's your car that you see being made—all for you—out of your metal."

She passed a hand over throbbing eyes.

"I'm afraid I'm rather tired. I'm not used to the fantastic. It's very interesting, but entirely absurd."

"What else is Life?"

"Something more comfortable than this," she laughed. "I think I must go."

"Not till you accept the most trivial of offerings."

He led her away across the factory to the row of benches. Samples of what could be done, he explained, with a negligent wave. At one bench, where stood a man with a burnisher, he stopped. The man paused in his employment.

"I think you'll find this all right, sir."

"Beautiful. The joy in the making. Nothing like it. My dearest lady—this trifle."

He held it out to her. Fitted into an old carved ivory Florentine dagger handle, was a paper-knife blade, pliable as fine steel, shining with the true richness of silver.

"My own forging. In my laboratory." And, as she was examining it—"Is it a success?" he asked.

"I'm afraid it is," she said.

A fraction of a second afterwards she gasped, wondering what imp of unreason had induced her to make such an idiotic remark.

"Do you like the inscription?"

She turned the knife over and saw at the base of the blade her name, "Paula," tinily engraved in old Italian cursive script, with correct and exquisite flourishes.

"No biting in with acids. Your devoted servant and a diamond point."

She looked up at him, in instinctive admiration.

"You——?"

"It will take you a lifetime to learn all the funny things I can do. Now let us go out into God's sunshine."

The factory workers saw depart only a beautiful lady, who seemed to embrace them all, as she went out, in a gracious smile of leave-taking. They had no notion of the hundredfold bewildered woman who passed them by, unconsciously gripping the haft of the gleaming paper knife as though it were a weapon of defence.

The car waited by the factory gate. Pandolfo waved courteous invitation. She entered. How else could she get home from this dreadful Bermondsey district?

With his foot on the step, Pandolfo gave the brief order to the chauffeur:

"Ranelagh."

Paula started. "I don't know that I want to go to Ranelagh."

"I do," said he.

He climbed in beside her. "The fresh air and the grass and the trees will do you good."

Once more she surrendered. It would have been easy to plead an engagement; less easy, but more effectual, to decline to go to Ranelagh on the ground that she had had quite enough of his company for the afternoon. But her will power seemed to have deserted her. The lawns of Ranelagh allured; and, beyond nursing her loneliness, she had not a thing to do.

"I'll go," she said, "if you'll not talk to me until we get there. You must let me get the whirr of machinery out of my brain."

She felt physically tired. The whirr of the machinery had something to do with it; but consonant with that same whirr was the remorseless clanging of the man's personality. She closed her eyes, seeking rest. The stifling scenes of the past hour danced in crazy pageant before them. She had been caught up by a centrifugal force and whirled around a weird environment with which she found herself amazingly identified. The strange metal that streamed out of the retort was called by her name; the inchoate medley of parts that were being assembled, was her car in the making—he had taken her acceptance gloriously for granted, and it occurred to her for the first time that she had uttered no word of deprecation; she still clutched in her hand the gleaming little dagger, intensely personal, by its carved Florentine hilt.

The car rolled up to the club doorway. Said her host:

"Can I speak now?"

She smiled gratefully. "You've been very kind. Now I'm equal to anything."

"And there are people who say that I'm a sort of bellowing buffalo without an ounce of tact."

His childish appeal for commendation won her laughter. They passed through the club-rooms to the lawn. It was the end of the season. The last polo match had been played the day before. The tea-tables were sparse. Still, there were enough people to dress the pleasant scene. The red coats of the waiters afforded stimulating flashes of colour. Pandolfo in his imperial way commanded one of these myrmidons to seek cool and shade. They were conducted to the coolest and shadiest vacant table. The next was occupied by Lady Demeter and Spencer Babington.

Paula nearly fell into Clara's arms. Now that the floodgates of Pandolfo's speech were released, her short passage from club entrance to lawn had been one of considerable trepidation. Anything might happen: even the unreasonable swirling away of herself on the torrent. Clara, square and solid, was an islet of refuge. Spencer, too, a port of safety. Join them? Of course. Chairs were set, fresh tea ordered.

"I've been dragging our dear lady," said Pandolfo, "through the inferno of my Bermondsey factory. In this hot weather it's like the cave of the Nibelungs. There was nothing for it but to bring her into these sylvan glades."

"What do you make in your factory?" Spencer Babington asked drily.

Pandolfo gripped him by the shoulder and replied heartily: "The fortune of mankind."

The talk wandered idly on that idle lawn beneath the shade of the grand trees. The hurry and scurry of hard-

by London was forgotten. Here reigned the elegant leisure of a century ago.

"In a day or two there'll scarcely be a soul here," said Lady Demeter. "An empty paradise. Such a waste."

"It can't be helped," said Babington. "Whoever heard of people staying in town in August?"

Paula laughed. "It's the divinely appointed month for the human engine to be sent away for overhaul, isn't it, Spencer?"

"I've gone to Aix every August for many years," said Babington stiffly—he was but little over forty—"and to the treatment at Aix I owe my perfect health."

"Which reminds me, Paula dear," said Lady Demeter, "that I've got our reservations for Tuesday."

"Reservations?" Pandolfo leaned forward alert.

"Paula and I are going to Rênes-les-Eaux. Don't you know where it is? In Savoy. The only place where they can really take off fat. Demeter and Sir Spencer are going to Aix-les-Bains to cure gout."

If ever the sweetest-natured of women yearned to commit instantaneous amicicide it was Paula Field. She turned to listen to whatever Spencer Babington was saying; but she felt Pandolfo's questioning and somewhat humorous eyes upon her. She had veiled her summer movements in such gossamer vagueness. Country house visits; somewhere abroad. And now came the tactless Clara trumpeting her immediate plans. She heard Pandolfo say:

"Rênes-les-Eaux? My dear Lady Demeter, you have given me an inspiration. I have long suspected that I'm heavier than I should be."

"You, Sir Victor?" Buxom Lady Demeter chuckled as she glanced at the strongly knit figure. "What do you want to reduce for?"

"Ah!" said he. "That is my secret."

She put her head close to his and murmured: "Are you so sure?"

"Absolutely."

But an exchange of glances caused him to exult in the discovery of an ally. A valuable one, he thought, who would guide him by trim little paths and save him from having to crash through the forest like a rhinoceros.

"Would you mind if I joined you at Rênes-les-Eaux?"

"Mind?" she cried. "To two lone women you'd be a godsend. Paula—do you hear that? Sir Victor's coming to Rênes."

"I'm sure Aix is much better for whatever you may be suffering from," said Babington, fingering the broad ribbon of the monocle.

"There is just that possibility," Pandolfo replied. "What do you think, Mrs. Field?"

Paula, for the second time, apostrophized, said with an assumption of laziness:

"Mont-Dore in the Auvergne is quite a good place."

Pandolfo waved her a hand. "Abana." Another to Babington. "Pharpar." To Lady Demeter he made a little bow. "Jordan. You have prevailed."

The summer day began to wane. Lady Demeter learning, on enquiry, the lateness of the hour, started up in alarm. She was doing something that evening; what it was she couldn't remember; but she was sure there was something. It compelled her to the crime of leaving Arcadia.

"And split up our delightful little party?" said Paula.

"Couldn't we all go back together?" said Babington in his dry voice. "So charming a quartette. Lady Demeter's car is as vast as her heart."

Paula smiled on a baffled Pandolfo. "Your chauffeur can find his way home without you, can't he?"

"So long as I am with you," said Pandolfo, "my chauffeur is as the dust in the desert."

Lady Demeter dropped Paula, Babington, and Pandolfo at their respective homes and then drove back to Hansel Mansions.

She found Paula brooding in the dusk of her drawing-room.

"I'm glad to see you're ashamed of yourself."

Paula drew herself up majestically.

"What do you mean, Clara?"

"No woman who isn't ashamed of herself can have sulks in a chair without taking off her hat."

Paula skinned the thing off and threw it on a little table and smoothed her hair.

"Oh, friendship has its limits."

"I'm not exceeding them," said Lady Demeter comfortably. "You made use of my car so as to avoid driving back alone with Sir Victor. You let him down publicly before Spencer and myself, and put me into an awkward position."

"What about me?" asked Paula.

"Why can't you marry the man and have done with it?"

"If I married him I should only begin with it."

"Begin with what?"

"If you can't see for yourself, it's no use my telling you."

"He comes of an old Italian family."

Paula started and pounced. "Did he tell you that?"

"No. But someone else did. Who was it?" She searched a tricky memory. "No matter. But he does, I asure you."

"If it comes to essentials," said Paula, "everybody's descent must date back to the beginning of time."

"I know all that. It's silly," said Lady Demeter. "We're talking about birth in its recognized sense. The Pandolfos were quite big people in the sixteenth century—Ferrara, Ravenna, Taormina—no, that's Sicily—Toronto——"

"That's Canada."

"How stupid of it! Well somewhere, darling. Sixteenth century Italy is like the cinema film of an opera—you can't make head or tail of the thing. Anyhow they quarrelled with the Pope and settled down in England about a hundred years ago."

"Why didn't they go back sixty years ago, when Italy became a United Kingdom and the Pope was shut up in the Vatican?"

"Because they became English, my dear," replied Lady Demeter. "Once English, always English. What had they to do with silly Italian affairs?"

"And Papa Pandolfo? Who was he?"

"A wealthy merchant. Stock Exchange—money market. Well, you see for yourself. He rolls in money."

She was so good, so trusting, so convinced in her deliciously vague way, that all was for the best in the best of all possible worlds, that Paula's irritation fell from her like a garment. She emerged all smiles. Who could be really angry with Clara Demeter?

"My dear," she said, "I wouldn't marry Victor Pandolfo if he had the blood of all the Colonnas and Orsinis and Sforzas in his veins."

"And why?"

"Because——" she said, and all her radiant beauty smiled.

"And what about Rênes-les-Eaux?"

Paula made a counter-gesture of irritation.

"He's coming. Nothing on earth can prevent him," said Lady Demeter.

Paula took a cigarette from a box, deliberately lit it—Lady Demeter being a notorious non-smoker, there was no lapse of hospitality—and towered majestically in front of her friend.

"What has that to do with me?"

"For what you've done and said and hinted, my dear," replied Lady Demeter, who had more shrewd moments than an indulgent world gave her credit for, "I've gathered that you're a bit afraid of Victor Pandolfo."

"Afraid?"

The word was an outrage. The pink and plump and kindly Clara sitting lumpily in front of her, dared to suggest the cancelling of an engagement on the grounds of fear. Ancestral valour spoke.

"I'm afraid of no man alive! Good God! What do you take me for?"

Lady Demeter was wise enough not to take her for anything except her prized travelling companion.

"So Tuesday stands?"

"Of course it does," said Paula.

CHAPTER VI

Rênes-les-Eaux lies in the heart of Savoy. You get to it, even from its distant railway station, by a valley road, winding between rugged mountains scarred by water-courses, down which ribbons of cascades fall precipitously into the milky stream that, in its turn, feeds the great Isère. In summer-time, your road thither or further on or round about leads through a fairyland informed by the spirit of a gentle ogre. The wild heights, all scaurs and escarpments and crags, might be so ugly and violent; but Providence has ordained that man should cultivate them in reverence. The vast panorama of the valley wears the smile of the Surrey Hills. There, away up in the clouds, where the benevolent stranger might dissuade a goat from venturing, lie peaceful farmsteads of meadow and fields of corn and maize, and here and there a patch of vines, all terraced out down the declivity, and, in the midst, the pink- and yellow-washed farm-buildings with their brown, shingled roofs. The lower slopes show a land of luxuriant herbage, in which cream-coloured cattle wax fat and sleek. The faint tinkle of their bells is music to the ear alert. It is a land of courtesy and gentle manners, preservative of its nationality. Titular Italy or titular France, to the Savoyard it has always been Savoy. Like the Breton or the Basque, he has the breeding of a pure race.

You turn a corner and fall, all of a sudden, into Rênes-les-Eaux—a few acres of capricious plain in the bosom of the mountains. Two glacier-fed torrents leap over boulders through its outskirts and meet in boisterous turbu-

lence like water-dogs at play. The little place is embowered in sycamores. There is the Grande Allée, full quarter of a mile in length, from the row of shops, past the pleasant hotels, chairs, and tables set out all the way, past the miniature park adjacent to the modest and unsuspected Etablissement des Bains, to the Mecca of the Votaries to Tenuity (for whom the place exists), the kiosque built over the fountain, whence gush eternal the lukewarm waters that give the place its title. And there, in the well, stand smiling Savoyardes in national costume, gold and black pointed Medici cap, fichu over bosom and full skirts, who hand up the over-brimming coloured glasses.

There was never such a tiny spot wrested from the wilderness for the benefit of the super-civilized. It is the *Fons Juventutis* of the adipose.

Paula, who had an eye for proportion, viewing the receding stream of pilgrims from her chair on the Allée, christened it the Broad Walk.

Clara Demeter's left hand clutched her arm while the other indicated one trousered and two skirted beams, a family trio.

"Darling, do say I don't look like that."

She received Paula's reassurance dubiously. If Hell knows no Fury like a woman scorned, Earth knows no pessimistic sceptic like a woman putting on weight.

They had arrived the day before, Paula still defiant of Pandolfo who had appeared at Victoria Station to see them off. There, however, she was protected by Lord Demeter and Spencer Babington, both bound for Aix-les-Bains. She noted amusedly a look of disconcertment on his face when he became aware of the two men, on whose escort he had not counted. As an offering he brought a neat luncheon basket fitted with Paulinium articles. An

experiment, said he, of some time ago. He deplored the lack of time to bring it up-to-date, but he had all the boxes and cups and things engraved with her initial. Besides, the basket held a far better meal than could be found on train or boat. He vaunted the wine. Lord Demeter shook him warmly by the hand as the saviour of his life; meals in trains half killed him. Later, in the flying Pullman, Babington eyed the basket malevolently and whispered to Lady Demeter a wish that he could throw the damned thing out of the window. Paula enjoyed the journey. Pandolfo's last words, as he waved his hat, had been:

"In a week or ten days I shall be with you."

And hers, mocking:

"I'm not the least bit frightened."

Yet now, sitting idle on that August afternoon under the shade of the trees, watching the slow procession, she felt conscious of a twinge of trepidation. Here was rest of mind and body. For her, radiant of health, no pummellings under hot douches, no early morning tramps in the mountains (save for her own good pleasure), no drinking of waters. Nothing to do but eat and sleep and sit in the shade and listen with ironical amiability to Clara's valetudinarian confidences. She resented the impending disturbance of this idyll of repose. He would dash into it like a bull or a tornado or any other Demon of Disquietude—playing havoc with everything. Possibly he might bring out with him, as a gift, a winged Paulinium horse—or a pair—worked by some diabolical motor power of his own invention, and insist on her going riding with him over the clouds. There was nothing fantastically imaginable with which you could not associate Pandolfo.

A plaintive sigh aroused her from her reflections.

"I must go to the source and drink that dreadful water."

"I'll come with you and see you do it," said Paula.

"I think you're very silly not to take the treatment," said Clara, rising. "It would do you all the good in the world."

"And you feel so lonesome, doing it all by yourself, don't you, dear?" laughed Paula. "I know I'm unkind, but I'll remain, for the present, as God has seen fit to make me."

She recalled a remark of Pandolfo's at Victoria, during a discussion of the modern female mania for thinness:

"I don't like," said he, "a woman to rattle in my arms."

The days passed restfully. A few acquaintances had found their way to Rênes-les-Eaux, affording the distraction of unimportant talk.

One day Lord Demeter and Babington motored over for lunch from Aix-les-Bains. Demeter, mild in his gambling as in everything else, glowed faintly as the winner, up-to-date, of nine hundred and fifty francs. He told Paula the tale three times. Spencer Babington did not play. It was against his principles. Not, he explained, that he saw intrinsic harm in gambling; if any mind was broad, that mind was his; but he held it incorrect for a high Foreign Office official to be seen playing at international tables. It was a question of the prestige of British diplomacy. His broad-ribbon hung monocle held between finger and thumb emphasized the proposition.

The meal over, they left the hotel and crossed the gravelled walk to their table, one of a brightly filled row, beneath the line of sycamores. Instinctively the couples

detached themselves, the two pairs of chairs some distance apart. Clara died to know how her dear old thing was progressing under his cure, and with wifely affection listened to the barometric account of symptoms. Babington looked round with the air of a conspirator, and leaned his long body forward so that his head was close to Paula's.

"I have something of the utmost importance to tell you," he said in a low tone. "It's the main reason for my coming over to-day. I couldn't write it. These things must be secret. Confound the fellow!" he cried, edging his chair nearer, as the scarlet-vested Arab came hovering round in quest of orders for coffee. Paula laughed.

"Ali won't give you away. Besides, he doesn't talk English."

"In my vocation, one can never be too careful."

He waited until Ali, his mission fulfilled, had departed.

"What I'm going to tell you must go no further—" he cast a backward significant glance at the Demeters. "I won't ask for your promise. I take it for granted."

"Oh, do go on, Spencer," said Paula smiling. "It can't be as solemn as all that."

He made his tiny gesture of protest: "Of course, if you treat it as a joke——"

"How can I treat it as anything if I don't know what it is? Is it some dreadful scandal in the Vatican? A pretty naughty lady disguised as a cardinal?"

A wintry smile flickered over his face. Were she less tantalizing she would not be so adorable. He must bear with her gently.

"It concerns myself," said he.

"Really?"

She opened her eyes. He nodded gravely.

She said with wicked swiftness: "You're going to be married. Who is she?"

He flushed. "I'm going to do nothing of the kind."

"Well, what is it?"

"I was about to tell you. Two or three impending resignations will cause a reshuffling of diplomatic posts. Thank God, the infernal newspapers haven't got hold of the news yet. There'll be appointments to the new Central European States——"

"And you're going to get one," she flashed. "Oh, I'm so glad. Which one is it?"

"You've spoiled my story, Paula," he replied with an air of resignation. "All these matters are of infinite delicacy. In the first place the ambassadors or Ministers of Legation in question—I can't tell you who they are—haven't resigned yet. So no new appointments have been made. But I hear on good authority that my qualifications for one of the probable vacancies are being seriously considered in high quarters."

Paula regarded him indulgently. So like dear old Spencer. The mountain in labour and the ridiculous mouse popping out. She said:

"You know you have my warmest good wishes. Your career has always been of tremendous interest to me."

"But would you like me to go away, for a long term of years to—call it for the sake of argument—Ruritania?"

"I should certainly miss the dearest of my friends," she replied sincerely.

"You wouldn't be glad that I was out of the way?"

"Good Lord, no. What do you mean? I tell you I should miss you dreadfully."

Her surprise was so genuine that once more he took heart of grace.

"Well, then, supposing—Ruritania. Would you come

out with me? Think what we could do together in such a position. My influence, which means the influence of Great Britain, would be doubled, trebled, multiplied—in terms of rhetoric"—he smiled—"a millionfold."

Paula sighed, looked at him with a queer, tired tenderness, and laid her palm on the back of a hand that was gripping his knee.

"Oh dear, oh dear! Can't you leave poor King Charles the First's head out of the memorial?"

He gave a forlorn sign of acceptance of her refusal, for he knew from monotonous experience the futility of argument. He made one effort, however, to save his dignity.

"I would have you remember that this is only a contingent proposal," said he, and turning towards the table on which the Arab had set the coffee, asked her if she took sugar.

Paula reflected that he might have acted in a precisely similar manner had she been a foreign diplomatist to whom he wished to signify the end of a conversation.

Later, as the men were preparing to depart, Babington drew her aside from the waiting car.

"Of course, I did not tell you that I was prepared, in any circumstances, to accept an offer. A bachelor minister in a central European capital must lead a very lonely life. The thought terrifies me. It isn't as if I needed —well—you know I'm a man of private means. I love occupation and the sense that I am doing my country's work. But in this particular case, you will have a great deal to do with my decision."

"My dear Spencer," she replied, "I absolutely refuse to be responsible for the fate of Europe."

She moved towards the car and he had to follow. Lord Demeter consulted a fussy watch. They must start or he would miss the appointment with his doctor.

"Frank," said Paula, "is one of the few men who take their gout seriously."

"Poor darling!" cried Lady Demeter, "if you only could have seen his toe last spring."

Paula asked: "And what about your toe, Spencer?"

"I'm glad to say," he replied drily, "that I was never acutely aware that I possessed one. My cure is entirely preventive."

The men took their leave. The car drove off. The two women strolled down the terrace of the hotel.

"I love Spencer," said Paula. "If only he were my uncle, I should ask little more of life."

A few more days of peace and then, with great purring of engines and blowing of horns, descended Sir Victor Pandolfo in his vast touring car which seemed to take up half the tiny place. It was evening, just before the dressing-hour, and Paula, taking the air on her balcony, saw him arrive. An instinct of curiosity conquered an instinct of withdrawal. For it was an arrival with more than a touch of the grandiose. The horn sounded with the authority of the Last Trump summoning racing red-jacketed, white-aproned porters, and a hurrying manager. A valet leaped from the seat next the chauffeur and opened the car door. Pandolfo alighted majestically. He doffed a hat and shook the manager warmly by the hand. She could see him saying: "I am Sir Victor Pandolfo. My rooms of course are ready?" The manager bowed low. There also descended from the car another occupant, a young man, apparently about thirty, with a gaunt dark face and a curiously shrunken figure, who stood patiently behind the great man until the latter, with a flourish introduced him to the manager. The young man saluted courteously. Pandolfo lingered, obviously expressing his admiration of the mountain em-

bosomed spot. He seemed to take a possessive pride in it, as though it were a purchased estate which he was seeing for the first time. The dusk was gathering. The tabled terraces and the gravelled road were deserted. In order to improve his view, he marched into the center of the road and swept the amphitheatre. And then, of course, he saw her lone figure on the balcony against the hotel façade. Hat in hand he flung up both arms in greeting. She could do nothing less than nod him a discreet welcome. His voice rose clear through the still evening air.

"You dine with me, of course. You and Lady Demeter if she will honour me. I have brought an offering of grouse. You can't refuse. Quarter of an hour? Half an hour?"

"Three quarters," said Paula.

What else could poor woman do? She could not bawl down, for all the world to hear, the explanation that Lady Demeter was on the *régime,* that the two of them had a nice little corner table to themselves far away from the orchestra, and that she had not the remotest desire to dine with him and eat his grouse. It was no use saying that she was ill and would dine in her room, for he would not believe her; besides she had a very healthy appetite. Also had not Clara, in her exasperating Barnum way spread the glad tidings of Pandolfo through the hotel? Refusal would have been silly.

"You'll have a dinner fit for gods," he waved a hand around, "fit for this Paradise! *Au revoir.*"

Clara Demeter burst into her room towards the end of her dressing.

"Pandolfo says we're dining with him. He has brought grouse. The marvellous man thinks of everything."

"Except your *régime*," said Paula.

"I'd carry half a stone extra for grouse any day of my life. Think of it! I missed them altogether last year in this wretched place and Biarritz afterwards. I thought I was going to miss them this year, too. It's a rotten country not to breed grouse. But God's good angel—" she stopped, catching a glint of the whimsical in Paula's eyes. "You don't think it ignoble of me to adore grouse?"

"There will also be the best Burgundy in the cellar."

"I know." Lady Demeter sighed. Then she brightened. "One only has one life," she said.

Pandolfo was waiting for them in the hall, at the foot of the staircase. Again he gave the air of being the owner of the house, the universal host. A man of distinction: Paula was forced to admit it, as her swift woman's glance caught the details of his appearance; the perfectly cut dinner suit moulding his strongly knit figure; the discreet onyx and diamond studs, links and white-waistcoat buttons; the urbane defiance of fashion in his low shirt collar; the wavy thick bronze hair sleekly trimmed, brushed back without a parting, away from his broad forehead; the laughing dark eyes; the heavy accentuated features; the strong, yet delicate and nervous hands extended in their familiar southern gesture of welcome. She caught a reluctant breath of admiration. For all his fanfaronading and gasconading and general impossibility from her narrow social point of view, he was an intensely virile creature; a man; a big man; a thing of male muscle and brain and passions; a man whom any woman, not quite sure of herself, might be acquitted before the court of her own soul for fearing with cold terror, were she never so valiant.

He received them, all smiles, courtesy and charm. His

manners were unimpeachable, though his manner was flamboyant. In kindly fashion he brought into the group the shrunken man whom Paula had seen from her balcony.

"Mr. Uglow—Gregory Uglow—my partner, my second self."

Paula regarded the young man with considerable interest. In his conventional dinner-suit he no longer gave the impression of deformity that had struck her when he had crept, somewhat painfully, out of the car. Perhaps one shoulder was the least little bit higher than the other. There had been no lameness noticeable in the few steps of his approach. Yet there was an indefinable indecision in his gait. He had fine, ascetic features, the swarthy skin drawn tight over the cheek bones, such as one sees in post-Raphael and Spanish pictures of monks and martyrs. He had sad brown eyes like a dog's. Black and flashing in his sensitive face, they might have proclaimed him a poet, a genius and betrayed an eager spirit wasting the frail body to decay; but they were just brown, kindly, dull, patient.

Paula smiled on him.

"You came by car? A pleasant journey?"

"Delightful. Sir Victor was all for doing the eight hundred kilometres in a stretch. He's made of iron. But" he smiled and shot a swift glance at Pandolfo—"he recognizes that other people aren't. So we stopped the night en route."

"I should just think so," cried Paula. "It's lunatic to go eight hundred kilometres—that's five hundred miles, isn't it?—without a break."

"It's his way," replied Uglow gently.

She was about to make a tart retort, when she met his faithful eyes. She changed it into:

"It's the way of an overgrown child."

"Isn't that in itself a tribute?" he asked.

Pandolfo, turning from Lady Demeter, swept them into the salle à manger. He had the great manner that commands the hypnotic subservience of maîtres d'hôtel and waiters. He had come to Rênes-les-Eaux, entirely unknown to the management, save for a reference to Lady Demeter, who unconsciously had built up a legend around him, and instantly he had established himself as a potentate. Soup was served. He caught the head waiter's eye, and beckoned.

"Louis——"

"Monsieur——?"

He gave the order for toast Melba.

"How did you know his name was Louis? I've been here ten days without knowing it."

So Paula.

"Dear lady—the immediate establishment of human relations with those on whom you are dependent is the beginning of wisdom."

She could imagine him establishing human relations, before dinner, with the head waiter. "I am Sir Victor Pandolfo——" "Yes, sir." "Your name?" Louis." "Then, Louis, now that we know each other I have brought grouse which the chef must cook well but lightly. Have you been in England?" "Yes, at the Carlton, Ritz, etc. etc." "Then the grouse is your responsibility." All humorous impressiveness, magnetism.

Clara Demeter caught him in the toils of her cure's fairy-tale, stripped herself reminiscently of her daily centigrams of flesh, and constituted herself his medical adviser. Paula turned to Gregory Uglow.

"You surely haven't come for a cure?"

"Only in the sense that a holiday and new scenes are

a cure. I was getting rather flattened out in London—close laboratory work, you know—and Sir Victor picked me up and carried me off at a few hours' notice. He does sudden things like that."

"He must be an interesting man to work with," said Paula.

"Far more than interesting," he replied pleasantly. He added in a lower tone: "I have every reason to believe him to be the most wonderful man that ever lived."

There was a note of adoration in his voice, profoundly sincere, that vibrated. A man who could compel a fellow man to such expression, must have spiritual qualities of which she had hitherto taken scant heed.

"Sometime you must give me reasons for your belief."

His face lit up. "Would you really care?"

"Of course. But not now."

"Ah no!" They both laughed. She liked him, his quiet voice, his gentle manner, his steady eyes. The pathos of the malady, whatever it was, that gave him his air of emaciation and distortion moved her pity. He had the thin, silky hair of the invalid. Sensitive, he read her thoughts, flushed and, after a few moments' shy silence, during which he crumbled his bread:

"I got knocked out in the war. Gassed—and other things. I was only a private. Then he came along."

He turned swiftly from Lady Demeter.

"I'm not going to do it, Mrs. Field. I'm not. I'm not going to see my solid thews and sinews waste away under this diabolical treatment. I'm solid. Not a flabby bit on my body. Feel that!"

He braced the muscles of his arm and bent towards Paula.

"Yes. Feel it. Squeeze it. Try to hurt."

Courtesy compelled her to lay fingers on his sleeve. It

might have covered marble. He laughed triumphantly.

"A bar of your own paulinium."

Lady Demeter pricked her ears. "Paulinium, what's that?"

Pandolfo fell from his high estate. "You haven't told her?" he asked reproachfully.

"Told me what?" interjected Lady Demeter.

Paula entangled and shrinking from hurting a host's feelings, said lamely:

"I thought it was a secret."

"Secret? Why, the whole wide world's ringing with it. Isn't it, Gregory? My new metal, Lady Demeter." He leaned back in his chair and, in a tone of challenge: "You've heard of my new metal, haven't you?"

"Of course."

"Well, it's called 'paulinium' after our dear lady here."

"How idyllic!" cried Clara, her kind face beaming. "I must throw cure to the winds and drink to its success." She raised her glass. "Grouse—paulinium—and—where did you unearth this wine?—What a heavenly evening!"

She was radiant in physical and romantic beatitude. Once a little lion had dedicated a novel to her, and she had felt the Egerian thrill. But he had proved himself afterwards to be but a poor mangy little lion of no account: incomparable with the Lion Magnificent by her side. She caught Paula's eye and made a swift, funny little gesture with her hands, which Paula ironically interpreted as a desire to shake her.

"If such an honour had been paid me, I should have trumpeted it all over London."

"You command a fanfare, my dear," said Paula. "I, only a little painted thing you get out of a toy shop. Besides—as I said—I thought it was a secret."

Pandolfo reverted to his bodily condition. Why had

he thought he needed reduction in weight? A passing fancy such as any man might have. His doctor, when consulted, had smiled indulgently and said a course of treatment would do him no harm. Why undergo physical discomfort to no appreciable end? Gregory Uglow, on the other hand, would derive enormous benefit from the electrifying waters of Moulins close by. Mrs. Field and himself would be merely idlers with the whole day at their common disposal. They would motor among mountains and, supreme on Alpine summits, could survey the little world below them.

Clara Demeter called him down to earth by a rhapsody over the grouse and the Chambertin. She was enjoying herself prodigiously. Sir Victor was the lord of hosts. It sounded profane; but he knew what she meant.

Dinner over, they went out into the warm August night. Lady Demeter took Pandolfo by his paulinium arm and led him aside. Once more did Paula wish her friend evil. If ever woman was intent on questioning man directly about honourable matrimonial intentions, that woman was Clara Demeter. She shrugged her shoulders, however, and sat down by the side of the young man, Gregory Uglow. She was on the point of referring to his partnership with Pandolfo, of which she had never heard, when he anticipated her.

"Mrs. Field—you'll forgive my speaking about myself, won't you?" he said eagerly. "But you're so kind and sympathetic. I've been shivering all the evening in a sort of garment of false pretences. Sir Victor introduced me as his partner. It's only his great big way—so as to give me a position and save my face. I'm not. I'm only his humble assistant and confidential secretary."

Nerves somewhat on edge prompted a sharp reply.

"If you're good enough to be called his partner, you

must surely be good enough to be taken into real partnership."

He winced as though she had uttered blasphemy.

"You don't know what Sir Victor is—still less what I am. How could I dare to dream of such a thing?"

"He has put you into a false position, anyhow, which you yourself feel."

"Only as regards yourself, Mrs. Field," he replied seriously.

"Eh?" She questioned him with quick eyes. "What have I to do with it?"

He twisted long, nervous fingers.

"It's so impossible to explain. These personal things —well—" he moved his head in embarrassment, from side to side.

"Well?" Paula amused, insisted.

He thought for a moment. "You come into contact with ninety-nine human beings and, to employ scientific jargon, there's no reaction whatever. With the hundredth there is."

"And I'm the hundredth?"

"You are—you," said he.

She smiled him her thanks and sank back in her cane chair. Is there a woman alive, be she never so beautiful, who is not interested to learn that she has caused a reaction in the soul or nature or complex or whatever you may choose to call it, of an agreeable and painfully sincere young man. She was in rebellious mood.

"Tell me some more," she commanded.

"About Sir Victor?"

"Lord no! About yourself. Reactions and things. The word isn't modern jargon. It's as old at least as Newton. I received an expensive education and still remember something about the Third Law of Motion."

"Action and reaction are equal and opposite," he quoted. "How wonderful of you to know it." He regarded her awe-stricken.

"If you asked me for the other two, I should be helpless. But this one always appealed to me. What happens when one thing going bang in the air meets another thing going bang in the air never interested me a bit. But——"

"But——" the young man grew suddenly fervent—"the application of the law to emotions—their action and reaction."

She smiled radiantly. "You mean that you can only react to a human being in the measure of that human being's action on you."

"So you see what I mean about the ninety-nine and the hundredth."

She nodded, then pointed to the mountain-barred strip of sky. It was black velvet and stars and the softness of the wings of moths. The air was scented with the night-release of the perfumes of all the mountain sides.

"And that?" she asked.

"I'm a poor student of science—not a poet. Besides, it's so difficult to translate one's feelings into words. I'm not accustomed to it."

"Why not begin now? Indeed you've already made an excellent beginning."

He looked up at the sky, then at her, then at Pandolfo advancing with Lady Demeter, then at her again and made a little bow.

"All I can say, at the present moment, is that God is very good to me."

CHAPTER VII

Paula spent two or three scared days, ever falling into traps, with eyes wide open. The tireless man had an inexhaustible genius for giving; like a lump of radium. As yet Paula had been powerless to refuse. The radium analogy had not occurred to her. She shrank from hurting him, as she would have shrunk from spurning a child's gift of wilted wild-flowers. As a matter of fact, it was the offering of a wild-flower that brought about the worst scare of all. It was one of singular beauty only found in the higher valleys of Savoy, and even there rarely seen. One, Jonathan Roundbegg, a botanist acquaintance, chance-met at Rênes had described it, more from the æsthetic than from the learned point of view. Said Paula rashly:

"I should love to see one."

Pandolfo rose to his feet. "You shall."

Mr. Roundbegg reminded him that scientific knowledge allied to trained observation was essential to the identification of the flower. Pandolfo magnificently declared that his will would predominate over technical disability. The name? The botanist only knew the Latin one, insignificant of meaning to Savoyard mountaineers.

"If you hunt for twenty years, you'll never find it," said Mr. Roundbegg.

"With me," cried Pandolfo, "Mrs. Field's wishes are commands. Within—not twenty years—but twenty hours I'll lay a specimen at her feet."

The next day he was absent. Gregory Uglow explained that he had taken the car to the Petit Saint-

Bernard, with the intention of scouring the mountain sides. He had started at five in the morning.

His rash undertaking had been declared at half-past nine the evening before. At five in the afternoon, Mr. Roundbegg, a prim and slightly sardonic man, stopped at Paula's table on the terrace.

"Our friend has only half an hour left. He said twenty hours."

"Sir Victor has a way of keeping his word," said Uglow, who was taking tea with Paula and Lady Demeter.

The botanist smiled. "Still, there's such a thing as a wild-goose chase."

"He has been specializing in it all his life and he's an expert," said Uglow. He glanced at Paula and she read in his eyes something that most likely did not lie behind them. But what she interpreted or misinterpreted, such was the scare in which she dwelt, was the imputation that she was one of the wild-geese of his successful chase. Mr. Roundbegg sat down and talked learnedly of Alpine flowers. Clara Demeter confessed a vague passion for edelweiss, which she had once picked somewhere in Switzerland. Since her marriage she had never gone back. Poor dear Demeter hated the country. It was, he said, only a glorified gymnasium and he loathed gymnastics. And the food was detestable, and he wouldn't carry a Swiss watch for anything in the world. He would only wear an old English watch as big as a warming-pan which made him bulge indecently. On spare men bulges were curiously noticeable. Another incorrigible habit of Demeter's was to go about with a bulky bunch of keys in his trouser pocket, chained somehow up to his waist. That caused another bulge. If cars ate apples he would go about with his pockets bulging with them as he did

at Hinsted, so that he would always be able to feed the horses, should the whim seize him to visit the stable.

She had a genius for leading the conversation, by means of connecting links from a boring topic. She took the minimum of interest in Alpine flora. All the same she had marked down Roundbegg, who was a Professor of Botany at a Midland University and an authority kow-towed to (so Pandolfo had assured her) by the Kew Gardens people, as a new lion to be asked down to Hinsted some December week-end when there would be no flowers about.

He took out his watch, triumphant in his scepticism.

"Five more minutes."

At that moment a Klaxon screeched and round the corner from the line of little shops, a hundred yards away, rolled the familiar touring car into the square. By the hotel Pandolfo alighted and, his quick eyes catching the group, marched diagonally across the path towards them. He was dusty and muddy, and his white flannel trousers were an offence to the eye. One jacket pocket, torn open, hung forlorn. In spite of bravado, he limped perceptibly. He grasped a trumpery bunch of blue-grey blooms, which, unceremoniously he thrust beneath Roundbegg's nose.

"That right?"

"Quite. But how the——"

"Never mind." He pulled out his watch. "Within twenty hours?"

The botanist made graceful admission. Two or three minutes to spare. Pandolfo turned to Paula, and dropped the tender flowers, dead for all the clump of moss in which they were enveloped, into her lap. She took the poor things up and admired their lingering delicacy. She had to express her appreciation, and to say with, at least, conventional graciousness:

"How can I thank you?"

Roundbegg burst in: "I don't see how you can thank a fellow who has worked a miracle."

Pandolfo, with mock flourish, took off his hat: "My friend, from you that is praise indeed."

Uglow, who had risen as soon as he approached, and had been watching him anxiously, took him by the arm.

"Do sit down, sir."

The startled twist of his body—hitherto, in his exuberance, he had been conscious of the existence only of his challenger and of Paula—caused an involuntary spasm of pain to contract his features. Paula leaned forward.

"You have hurt yourself?"

He laughed, leaned on Uglow for a moment and sank into the chair.

"Botanizing on slippery precipices is a recommendable game for chamois; not for human beings."

Then, suddenly, after a short breath or two, his head sagged and his body flopped half over the chair.

It was nothing more serious than a couple of broken ribs and a sprained ankle. A fortnight's absolute rest, said the doctor, and he would be on his feet again.

"But, Mesdames," said he to the two ladies, who forcedly had to constitute themselves his female protectors, "if he will lie tranquil and submit to the kindly processes of Nature, all will be well. *Mais, avec ce tempérament fougueux——*"

With his tempestuous temperament, anything might happen. They and his friend Monsieur Uglow must exercise their powers of restraint. A constitution of iron and a will of adamant alone had enabled him to walk the

ten kilometres from the scene of his accident to the Petit Saint-Bernard where he had left the car. It was not a simple promenade, those mountains. He, a Savoyard himself, knew the mountains like his pocket, and recognized the spot where the accident had happened. Only a madman would have adventured down the declivity. It was almost perpendicular. And to descend it for what? To find a flower—the little *orlaie*. It was, one might say, beautiful. It was rare and only existent on precipitous slopes. Certainly not worth a man endangering his life. Sir Pandolfo losing his footing must have rolled about fifty feet. And all he had to say was that if he hadn't rolled, he wouldn't have found the *orlaie*. How he managed to crawl up again defeated the doctor's power of divination. He implored the ladies and his friend Monsieur Uglow to keep him quiet. Meanwhile, he had telephoned for a trained nurse.

Here was another complication for a harassed woman. How could she treat with haughty disdain a man who not only had risked his neck and his reputation for infallibility in order to find her a rubbishy weed, but had travelled back to her with broken ribs and, his romantic mission accomplished, fallen at her feet like any tin-covered knight out of Sir Thomas Malory? It was touching. Clara Demeter wept tears so fat and sentimental that Paula, lest she should do her a mischief, fled from her presence. Her eyes were dry, dry almost to burning; but she felt the pathos of the idiotic adventure all the same. Sheer humanity compelled her to visit him, as soon as possible, under Clara's sheltering wing. Ribs set, torso bandaged, and a nurse from Aix-les-Bains in attendance, he professed vast comfort, ease and happiness. Paula chided him gently for his exploit. So much, after all, for so little.

"To gratify your slightest wish," said he, "I would willingly break every bone in my body."

Could lover say more? She knew that, in a sense, it was not rodomontade. It was sincere. His words implied a challenge to dare him to further deeds in her service. From one point of view she realized herself as the object of a passion anachronistically romantic. That sort of thing dated back to the quattrocenti Italians, when it was the mode for lovers to commit divine lunacies, such as freezing themselves to death, or sitting on glowing braziers in order to glorify their mistress. She caught at a memory: Maurice Hewlett's story of "Cecco and the Burning Coal." The situation became grotesque. All the more grotesque because it was governed by an element of grim reality. She knew from her knowledge of the man's will and self-exaltation that, were she to bid him fetch her a handful of snow from the summit of the highest peak of the Alpine range, whatever the unprofitable spot might be, she would get it—preserved in a paulinium lined thermos flask of his own invention, with an inscribed plate on the outside. And there could be no question of the genuineness of the handful. To that credit of him was she irresistibly compelled. Fraud could have no part in so supreme a self-creation. She admitted to herself her infinite faith in his integrity. Her talks with Gregory Uglow, the fervid ingenuous, would have swept away any lingering doubts. Naked and hungry, said Uglow, Pandolfo had taken him in; also a gassed and battered wreck of the war. He exalted his benefactor to god-head, giving chapter and verse for his faith. During the first few days of Pandolfo's lying-up, she saw much of the idolatrous young man.

She learned the meagre facts of his history. That he was of gentle birth she had realized from her first moment

of speech with him. No vagrom hawking of wares about his parentage. He came of an old Suffolk family, as poor as church mice and almost as extinct in these hygienic days. His father, a widower, had been hard put to it to send him to Cambridge, with a science scholarship from his local grammar school, in 1913. The war came. The father and his two sons were drawn into the whirlpool, from which Gregory alone came out alive. His younger brother had been properly looked after, and provided for at Eton by his uncle, Sir Ponsonby Uglow, a baronet of James the First's creation. Sir Ponsonby had also died, however, during the war leaving no issue, and his widow, apparently an extremely unpleasant woman, followed him soon after, having made a will whereby a horde of hungry German relations were the sole beneficiaries.

("A horrible creature!" cried Lady Demeter when the story was told to her. "I knew all about her. A Boche. She used to go about her grounds flashing signals with an electric torch, until—who was the charming fellow who had the Eastern Command at the time?—you know—he played the banjo so wonderfully—and he married a girl called Muriel—Muriel—I'll be forgetting my own name next. Anyhow, he stepped in and stopped her. And she drank herself to death on *crême de menth* or ether. Yes, I know all about her. Far better dead.")

These parenthetic and possibly apocryphal details formed no part of the young man's story. He merely stated the fact of the lady's demise and the testamentary disposition of her fortune.

Paula wrinkled a puzzled brow.

"It's rather hard to follow. So many people seem to be dead. But if your uncle Sir Ponsonby died without a son to inherit, then of course you——"

He interrupted quickly.

"My father had the title for a month and my poor brother for a week."

"How is that? You called him your younger brother——"

He explained, in his gentle manner. The Imp of Mischance had attended him since birth, until Sir Victor had come along with his potent exorcism. Only after he was born did his father marry his mother. It had been a wild and romantic affair. She had been a McCairn of Cairness, and dwelt in an ancestral stronghold somewhere in the region of Eddrachillis Bay in Sutherlandshire. The family could trace a descent, marred by grievous misalliances on its own part, to Malcom the Second, and therefore, when Simon Uglow, on a Highland walking tour, and bearer of brave letters of introduction, visited them, they received the guest, at first with splendid Highland hospitality, but, after a while, regarded with indignant anger the embryo practitioner of physic, son of an upstart baronet of James the First's creation—James the First—a mushroom—who had the audacity to demand the daughter's hand in marriage. In lofty irony they questioned him as to marriage settlements. When they found that he could only settle on the lady his name and his youth and the golden prospects of his medical genius, they threw him out of the house with all the observances of high-bred courtesy.

Now the lady, not being the descendant of Pictish kings for nothing, took matters into her own hands. Before young Uglow had time to realize the ignominy of his expulsion, he found himself in a sailing boat, with Elinor McCairn at the tiller, half-way across the North Inch. Thus, the wind prospering, they reached the Butt of Lewis, perhaps one of the spots on the earth the least subjected to the vigilance of Divine Providence. For a

couple of months they lived idyllically, although of necessity frugally, in the summer weather of a peculiarly glorious summer. They dwelt in a fisherman's hut and lived on oatmeal, mackerel, and illicit whisky.

Then, one fine day, a clumsy old paddle-wheeled steamer hovered around the point. A boat put off, and landed a determined party of angry gentlemen, who beat Simon Uglow and threw him into the sea, and by main force carried off the erring Elinor to the steamer.

In some such form did Paula reconstruct the romantic tale from Gregory Uglow's shy and sensitive confidences. He had heard the main grim facts from his father. Now and again his mother, when he was a little boy, had stirred his imagination with picturesque details of their castaway life.

Paula gathered that they stuck away a dumb and unconfessing Elinor in a turret chamber of Cairn Castle, until, to the consternation of the family, the wretched Gregory squeaked his first distaste of a cold world. Then they had to send in a hurry for Simon, who poor, though reprehensible lad, had no idea of what had been happening. They were married outright and sent south with the family malison. According to Scottish law the child was legitimatized and could inherit Scottish estates. But English law wagged its ponderous head. So did Sir Ponsonby Uglow, his brother's senior by many years, wag his in reprobation. So did his German wife who hated the proud Scottish lady at first sight. Wherefore, it came eventually to pass, that Dr. Simon's younger son, heir, after him, presumptive to the baronetcy, found favour in Sir Ponsonby's eyes, while Gregory of the bend sinister had to fend for himself.

Discharged from hospital and demobilized, he faced a world not clamouring for crippled young gentleman with

a smattering of science. The labour market resented the survivors of the war. The Trades Unions would not have them. The former were the pitiless "Haves"; the latter the contemptible "Have Nots." On all sides they felt upon them cold eyes wondering why they weren't decently dead. Thus was Gregory Uglow brought to regard himself as an intruder in the land of living folk; the land which its rulers were trying to make fit for heroes who had stayed at home to live in. Gregory might have been unreasonable in his rebellion against existing things; but he was also hungry and hopeless. Especially one night when he sat on a bench on the Thames Embankment somewhere in the neighbourhood of Cheyne Walk.

It was then that the miracle happened. In the moonlight before him passed a burly yet jaunty figure, carrying a paper parcel under his arm. Hardly had the man proceeded a couple of yards when, from some break in the parcel, an object dropped to the ground. Gregory picked it up, regarded it for some seconds first in surprise, then with interest. He followed and hailed the passer-by.

"Your pardon, sir—but you've dropped something."

Pandolfo turned and thanked him and said whimsically: "Why should you worry to restore me this bit of stone?"

"Because," said Gregory, "as far as I can judge in the moonlight, it's a mineralogical specimen and may be valuable."

"What the devil do you know about mineralogical specimens?" cried Pandolfo, looking the shabby young man up and down. "Here. Tell me what you think it is."

He drew a small electric torch from his pocket and flashed it on the lump in his left palm. Gregory, amused by the encounter, examined it. A memory of old labora-

tory days fixed upon such another lump, the second to the right on a third shelf. He laughed, in spite of his conviction that the world wished him dead and out of the way.

"At a venture, I should say it was mispikel."

Pandolfo deliberately flashed the torch in his face. "Young man," said he, "let us sit down and have a talk. One doesn't pick up an expert mineralogist on a Thames Embankment bench every night in the week. It's not mispikel, though the greatest authority in London, only a quarter of an hour ago, said it was. So you err in the best of company."

"What is it, then?" Gregory asked.

"Ah! That's what the Professor would give anything to know. I believe he cut a hole in this brown paper parcel, so that a specimen should fall out which he'll be able to pick up later between his house and mine."

Whereupon he sat down with a courteous wave of the hand to the place beside him and deliberately retied his parcel. His glance fell upon an ugly split in a shoe.

"If you will forgive the indelicacy of my question," said he, "may I ask whether you find the pursuit of mineralogy lucrative?"

Gregory rose—or the spirit of his Scottish mother within him——

"That's a question I'm afraid I can't answer. I wish you good evening."

Pandolfo leaped up and lifted restraining hands.

"Young man, to find offence is, often, to lose opportunity. I know all about you. You're a gentleman. You're a man of scientific attainment and you're down and out. And I'm damned if you're not hungry."

As though conjured up by Pandolfo's magic, an empty taxi-cab purred gently by. Pandolfo hailed it.

"Get in. You're coming with me. You'll find me as

proud as you are and twice as hungry. I've no use for people who don't do what I tell them."

Practically to avoid physical encounter, in which he would be worsted, and yielding to the stranger's cheery and full-blooded mastery, Gregory suffered himself to be pitched into the taxi-cab.

"It's more or less only round the corner; but I see that you've walked enough."

Gregory had a confused vision of a great house, and soft carpets and pictures and bits of statuary gleaming in the discreet light; of a long passage; of a vast octagonal shaped room, a medley of everything from comfortable leathern chairs and luxurious writing-desk to deal trestle tables strewn with weird objects and appliances and blueprints; of walls hung with a jumble of rare engravings and photographs of machinery. He noticed a cage of lovebirds at the far end. A man-servant had preceded them switching the electric lights.

"Supper here," cried Pandolfo. "Ham, chicken, beef, tongue, cold pie, everything you can lay your hands upon. And a bottle of champagne." He thrust the young man into a chair. "My name's Victor Pandolfo. I've invented everything from a machine to dry a woman's hair to an instrument for telling all about a submarine ten knots away."

Gregory had vaguely heard of him. Also he remembered having seen his name—a striking one—in a list of honours.

"Sir Victor—I think," said he.

"Why think when you know? Thought is a force that should be economized." He laughed. "Well, that's all about me. What about yourself?"

It was only later when fortified by good food and wine and the obvious gladness of his host at seeing him eat

and drink, that he plucked up courage to tell his story. He confessed to previous hunger and weariness; to the open air bed that awaited him on the Thames Embankment. After the manner of a proud, shy man, he told his story backwards, under the vivid questionings of Pandolfo, who never rested until he had traced him beyond his birth. Smatterings of knowledge—he declared, were of no use to him; he must know things from root to branch. Eventually he rang a bell violently. The manservant appeared. Pandolfo flung up a hand.

"Prepare a bedroom at once for Mr. Uglow. Mr. Uglow is my new private secretary. He arrived late and lost his luggage, so fit him out with what is necessary. Come back and report when all is ready."

The servant gone, he turned and beamed on the bewildered young man who stammered out:

"You're very kind—but I don't understand. Is it a jest on your part?"

"I have a vast sense of humour," replied Pandolfo magnificently. "But I would pray you believe I don't condescend to the type of pleasantry that was practised on one Christopher Sly—if that's what you're thinking of. If I say you're my private secretary, you are my private secretary."

The young man objected blankly. He knew not shorthand, nor had he ever fingered the keys of a typewriter. Pandolfo grew impatient. He had a score of shorthand-typists in his employ. Said Gregory:

"Then what could I do?"

"Everything I tell you. Train yourself to be Elisha to my Elijah. You'll do it. I've never made a mistake in my life. I know when men are lying and when they're telling the truth. You're enough of a man of the world to recognize that most people would attribute my action

in taking a tramp off a bench on the Thames Embankment and starting him with a commencing salary of four hundred pounds a year, and all found, as my confidential secretary and assistant, to softening of the brain. But my brain's extravagantly hard and alert. Yet, my young friend, a warning once and for all. Should you prove me wrong—should you let me down"—his eyes suddenly glittered like the points of the daggers of some reprehensible Neapolitan ancestor—"it were better for you not to have been born."

"Perhaps," said Gregory rising, "I had better go back to the Embankment."

Said Pandolfo: "I owe my success in life to a lack of the gambling instinct. The degraded word sportsmanship—except in its sense of giving everybody a fair deal—which is mere common honesty—has always appealed to me as the shibboleth of the unintelligent man trying to justify himself." In his quick way he threw open the doors of the octagonal room and flung out indicating hands. "The Embankment, and God knows what. Bed, ease, possible fortune, but in the meantime a hell of a life."

All pride in the young man—again the Highland mother whose high-born kinsmen (as in the classical case of Annabel Lee) took her far away from the Butt of Lewis—once more revolted.

The situation was not the normal and modern to which his mind was attuned. It contained something of the exotic, Arabian Nightesque. A vague flavour of Stevenson's story of "The Young Man with the Cream Tarts" mounted to his brain. He had stepped from the commonplace across the threshold of the unreal. Here, in ordinary dinner-suit, as courteous a host as one could wish to meet, stood a gentleman, who, to his disordered fancy

—remember the transition from starvation to surfeit and great indulgence to some derangement of faculties—seemed a sort of djinn, mocking behind his kindness, threatening behind his mansuetude. Idiotically he conjectured a battle between the devil and his immortal soul. He withstood the shock of a dynamic moment. Then, stalwart though unnerved, he reached out a thin hand:

"I can't thank you enough for your extraordinary kindness, Sir Victor—but——"

A tornado of a Pandolfo slammed the open main door and, turning swift, took the young man's lean shoulders in his nervous grasp, and threw back his head and laughed out loud.

"You damned young fool. Didn't I say I never bet except on a certainty? Go to bed right away. Clear out. You're here in this room to-morrow at nine o'clock." He pressed an electric bell and hung on to it far beyond the time of an ordinary master's summons. He seemed to stand there, slightly bent, triumphantly bantering, for five minutes. Then:

"Another drink? A nightcap? No? Well—good night. You'll find an agitated Jenks or Binks or whatever he calls himself awaiting you. If you haven't all you can possibly want, I'll electrocute him to-morrow. Give him your orders for bath and breakfast. And"—he pointed a finger—"nine o'clock here to-morrow."

That, according to Paula's co-ordination of many talks with him—some casual, others of more deliberate confidence, was the history of the first relations between Gregory Uglow and Pandolfo.

"I was as powerless as a sailing ship before a typhoon," laughed Gregory.

"That's all very well for metaphor," said Paula. "But, coming to bed-rock, suppose you hadn't made good?"

His mild eyes lit up.

"Who couldn't help making good under Sir Victor's inspiration? Even a worm wouldn't try to turn. At first I thought myself the greatest fraud under heaven; for, practically, I had forgotten all I had ever learned about mineralogy. I owed everything to a lucky hit, the trick of memory that recalled the specimen on the laboratory shelf. But that gripped his imagination. I must be a wonderful fellow . . . I've worked night and day, for years, in order to live up to the reputation."

"Has he ever told you his history?" Paula asked.

"No. Has he told you?"

"Only a very little. I should gather it was as romantic as yours."

Meanwhile Pandolfo fretted, not over his broken ribs, but over the inaction which they necessitated. He had arrived with the intention of whirling Paula all over the length and breadth and height of Savoy. He had dreamed of picnics by waterfalls and wondrous lunches at world-famed restaurants, of moonlight walks and irruptions into the pearl and diamond shops of Aix-les-Bains. And there he was, laid flat on his back for heaven knew how long, with nothing to give her but a grateful smile when she looked in once a day to see how he was faring. Of course, he sent his man, his chauffeur, Gregory, and sometimes his nurse to buy up the flower and fruit and chocolate supply of Rênes-les-Eaux. Both Paula and Lady Demeter had to stack their overflow along the corridor. But he chafed at such limited powers. He caused Gregory to deplete the little bookshop of its stock of detective fiction, which he read voraciously.

The nurse pleased him. She was small, trim, middle-class, efficient. He absorbed her into his entourage. He vaunted her as the most perfect nurse in the world, just as though he had manufactured her himself. Slyly he obtained from an unsuspecting Clara the names and addresses of a fashionable dressmaker and a milliner in Aix. He sent his car to Aix to fetch them. They were shown into a room occupied by a sick gentleman and a demure nurse.

"I want you to make this lady," said he, "the most beautiful dress you can and a hat to match. Will you kindly take her measurements."

Of the three dumbfounded females, the milliner first recovered her nerve.

"But, Monsieur," said she, "one does not measure ladies for hats."

"But, Sir Victor," said the nurse, "I don't want the things."

"You're going to have them," said he.

The nurse gave way, torn between mirth and disconcertment, and fled for succour to the only strong woman she knew of in her immediate vicinity.

"Mrs. Field, please tell me. What can I do?"

Paula took the girl by her arm and sailed into Pandolfo's room, where she found two bemused slaves, sincerely convinced that Monsieur's simple request was the most reasonable and commonplace action of a perfectly reasonable and commonplace man. They would send over, on the morrow, all their models and all their hats. Madame (the nurse) had only to choose. For the rest, as far as the dress was concerned, fittings could be arranged either there or at Aix, according to Madame's convenience.

"And, my dear Mrs. Field," said he, "if you will be so

gracious as to give Nurse Williams the benefit of your experience, I shall be more than ever your devoted servant."

"But, Sir Victor," cried the nurse, "you don't understand. I don't want Paris gowns and hats. When do you think I'd have the chance to wear them?"

"Precisely," said Paula coldly, "when?"

He puffed and waved a cigarette airily. "Biarritz, when she has done with me. She needs a month's holiday. I'll see to it. I have a dozen friends there who will give her a good time. A word from me and she'll find a score of motor-cars waiting for her at the station. Mesdames"—he addressed the purveyors of frippery—"It is understood. To-morrow all that you can display. Also if you know of a *lingère*——"

"Mais, moi-même, Monsieur——" the milliner broke in.

"It is perfect," said Pandolfo.

"I'm glad you think so," said Paula.

She marshalled the three women out of the room. The nurse, distraught, almost fell upon her. She didn't in the least want to go to Biarritz, although she knew that Sir Victor's friends must be perfectly nice people. Of course she would love a holiday; she hadn't had a week off for over a year. But she would like to spend it in Cornwall. Her father was a solicitor in Bodmin with a large family. She yearned to see them.

"Haven't you told him about all that—in the ordinary course of gossip between nurse and patient?"

"No," said the little nurse. "You don't need to talk to Sir Victor. He talks to you."

For a minute or two they argued round the point. Nurse Williams came back to it. What would be the use of all that finery in Bodmin?

"Besides," she added, "I can't accept it. It's wonderfully generous of Sir Victor—but I really can't."

"You shan't if you don't want to," said Paula. She led the way down the corridor to the landing. There was a cane seat by the side of the lift cage, on which she invited the nurse to join her. There was another a few yards off, by the side of the staircase, to which she motioned the two other women. Pandolfo had put them all into an idiotic position. Paula had to co-ordinate remote points of view:—

That of Pandolfo indubitably guileless, thinking only of showering his bounty in the most dazzling way possible on this pleasant and highly efficient little nurse.

That of the tradeswomen, compelled by their peculiar experience to the logical conclusion that an English milord had fallen in love with his nurse—and what more natural?—and desired to set her up in a manner befitting his quality. On their faces she read their souls' prognostics of a dozen dresses and twenty hats, to say nothing of silk stockings and diaphanous etceteras. Their joint vision embraced at least a thousand pounds sterling.

That of Nurse Williams herself, a clean-run, virtuous young Englishwoman, overwhelmed by a generosity monstrously absurd. In the direct, modern way, she said:

"If he had been silly, dear Mrs. Field, like lots of other men—and tried to make love to me, I could have understood and dealt with it—I've been nursing for nine years and know how to take care of myself—but he hasn't, I assure you—not that——" she flicked finger and thumb. "And he's such a dear. If he's not doing something for somebody else, you, Lady Demeter, Mr. Uglow, his chauffeur, his valet, he's perfectly miserable"—and so on and so forth.

Paula's own point of view did not matter. She held herself gloriously aloof. She made quick work of the tradeswomen. They could see that Monsieur, being a man, knew nothing about anything. It would be waste of time to bring out their entire stock-in-trade to Rênes. There was a far simpler way. As soon as the nurse could leave her patient, she would accompany her to Aix and together they would chose the present that, out of gratitude for services, Monsieur desired to make. Paula had a dignified and commanding way with her. The lift disappeared downwards with two impressed though somewhat obfusticated vendors of vanities.

Paula marched back to the sick-room. Nurse Williams followed her, and took refuge on the balcony. There was a pitched battle. Paula set out tersely the nurse's point of view.

"I don't care," he cried, "what her point of view is. It's wrong. I want her to have what she'll never have again in her life—unless she happens to marry a rich man. I want her to have a month of the best, with pretty clothes and champagne and ease and luxury. She deserves it, doesn't she? The little fool doesn't know what she's refusing. The Blakes are there, General and Lady Burgoyne, the—the Stonor-Mertons, Mrs. Withers—I met you at her luncheon party at the Carlton. They're as respectable as the front pews in a parish church. You don't suppose I'd send the child away without seeing she was looked after."

"She's not of their world," said Paula.

"She's a darned sight too good for it. But it's the best I can do. She's going to Biarritz. I've set my heart on it."

"If you wriggle about like that," said Paula, "you'll be going to a world where there are no dressmakers and

milliners, as far as I've heard, worth speaking about—and where, decidedly, you won't be allowed to have your own way."

He fumed. "I should like to see the devil who would prevent me."

"Out of mere delicacy," smiled Paula, conscious for the first time of a position of mastery, as she stood calm over the chained giant, "I was referring to the other place, where restrictions are more subtle."

"You're nimbler than I in wit," said he. "You almost beat me the first time we met."

"And I've beaten you now," said Paula.

He protested. They argued. Paula held her ground.

"Since your motives come from pure generosity, you will give Nurse Williams a month's holiday in Bodmin, and commission me to choose her a modest little outfit that won't outrage the bosom of her family."

"But can't you understand, I want her to go to Biarritz?"

She wrinkled her brow. This vanity of giving seemed so childish.

"Suppose you insisted on her wearing a crown and sitting on a golden throne."

"I would, if I could afford it. I'd make her queen over the whole universal corporation of nurses. A girl like that moiling away in obscurity, with never a golden hour in her life! At any rate she'll have a golden month."

"In Bodmin."

"Never," cried Pandolfo.

"Then, Sir Victor"—she swept an ironic curtsey—"I regret to give you two minutes' notice of the end of our pleasant acquaintance."

She moved towards the door and turned the knob. His deep eyes were fixed on her. The battle crisis was con-

summated in a tense silence. Presently he beckoned her with his forefinger.

"Paula."

It was the first time that he had addressed her so directly. She approached the bed.

"I'm not fond of anticlimax. But to please you, the little fool shall go to Bodmin." He held out a hand which she took in token of bargain. But he held it fast, and drew back her arm so vehemently that, in order to steady herself, she had to put the other hand on the edge of the bed. And during this momentary nearness of their faces, he whispered, so that his voice should not reach the balcony where an anxious and alert young woman was stationed:

"And you—won't you accept everything that I have to give? You know that I'm the only man for you in the wide world. You've got to marry me. You know you have."

At that moment, Nurse Williams, who had heard the preparatory clicking of the door latch and become aware, as she thought, of the cessation of talk, modestly entered the room. The queer attitude of the couple could bear but one interpretation. She uttered a little gasp and bolted back to the balcony. The gasp broke the spell. Paula freed herself from Pandolfo's relaxed grip and half consciously rubbed her wrist. For all his broken ribs he could exert uncommon physical strength. They regarded each other foolishly.

"I'm afraid," said Paula, "this is one of the anticlimaxes which you dislike."

Whereupon she fled.

"Nurse," said Pandolfo, when she reappeared in obedience to his summons, "you are going to Bodmin and I'm going to marry Mrs. Field."

Paula went to her own room in a condition of mind so complicated that, in the brief journey, she did not seek to unravel it. Time enough when she got there. She found a pile of correspondence, letters and newspapers, awaiting her. She grasped eagerly at the distraction. The first letter she opened was one from her father, Mr. Christopher Veresy, of Chadford Park in Gloucestershire. It was long, and in crabbed handwriting. She always skimmed her father's letters so as to seize the salient facts indicated by the hieroglyphics, reserving full deciphering for half an hour of leisure. Now, the salient facts indicated a tale of dreadful woe. There was something about a scoundrel called Monte Dangerfield in the City, a rigmarole about Patagonian Eldorados —it might have been Peruvian Bonanzas, but the first seemed the better guess; a wail of ruin; Chadford Park would have to go; the words "a flat in Putney" were written with the legibility of despair; and, also, at first sight decipherable, was the intimation to his dearest Paula that, as far as he could see, the continuance of her allowance was a financial impossibility from a heartlessly robbed victim who had just escaped bankruptcy by the skin of his teeth. The last words were printed. Mr. Veresy scorned imagination in the use of metaphor.

Paula put down the letter, somewhat dazed by the apparent loss of half her modest income. Mechanically she pulled about the rest of her correspondence. Beneath the pile lay a telegram. It came from Aix-les-Bains. The text ran:

"Famous for ham and battle."

It was only after much holding of throbbing temples that she realized it was Spencer Babington's cryptic and, from his point of view, entirely unhumorous announcement of the awful, world-convulsing secret that he had

been offered the appointment of British Minister to Czecho-Slovakia, of which, as all the world knows, the capital is Prague.

If, in the circumstances above detailed, she yielded herself, ever so little, to the hysterical, who can blame her?

CHAPTER VIII

THERE had been Veresys of Chadford in Gloucestershire from time immemorial. Legend brought the first Veresy over with the Conqueror. The family had to refer to Domesday Book and then skip two or three centuries. Anyhow the first authentic ancestor had built the castle of Chadford (of which a wing and a trace of moat still remained) towards the end of the fourteenth century. It was a descent good enough for honest and unpretentious folk. It was on record in the archives that had it not been for the premature death of Godfrey de Veresy, slain by a miscreant arrow through the eye, at the very beginning of the Battle of Tewkesbury, the House of York would have been wiped out of existence, and the evils that overspread a non-Lancastrian kingdom averted for ever. The manuscript was written in Monkish Latin by no less a person than the Prior of Chadford Priory (later razed to the ground by Henry VIII) and Godfrey de Veresy's confessor; and, therefore, its accuracy was unimpeachable. Around Godfrey de Veresy blazed the glory of the family. For succeeding generations to attempt to outdo him in achievement was regarded as sacrilege. It was (according to Paula's irony) an article of family pride that for nearly five hundred years not one single member had condescended to distinguish himself. God had given them the Keep of Chadford, which, owing to the fruitfulness of broad acres, evolved itself gradually into the amenity of Chadford Park. The whole end and aim of the house had been to keep a Veresy

at Chadford. Never till now had there been a hint of failure.

Paula could take a humorous view of her ancestry. But through her veins ran the blood of all those to whom the crumbling grey donjon had been a profane Rock of Ages. The possible sale of Chadford was a desecration and the poet's nightmare. Chaos had really come again.

The broad acres had long, long since vanished from the family grip. But a hard-headed Veresy or two had engaged in the India trade a century ago, and reconstituted the fortunes of the family. Her grandfather had been a director of the Great Western Railway. Her father, who had started an elegant life as a lieutenant in the Dragoon Guards, a position which he surrendered on coming into his estate, she had always considered a man of ample means, in spite of disgruntled comments on the dreadful condition of the modern world in which no gentleman (damme!—his oaths were mellow) would be permitted to exist. She had passed her young days in the ease of a great establishment. On her marriage he had made no settlements, but had offered a generous allowance which he increased slightly on her widowhood. Of his more recent grumblings she took no more heed than of those of any other comfortable gentleman, Lord Demeter for instance, who still managed to keep a staff of servants, a few motor-cars, and an excellent cellar of port. The ruin of the Veresys was incredible.

What had Myrtilla been thinking about? Myrtilla was her elder sister, a confirmed spinster with a hard head and a clock-work organ that went by the name of a heart, who had taken charge of Chadford and Mr. Veresy after the death of their mother some years ago. She wandered round with keys and account books and verified to an ounce the household consumption of meat. Chad-

ford Park was a house run on the scientific lines of a Swiss hotel. Comfort prevailed, but prodigality was sternly checked. No man wasted his substance in riotous living less than Mr. Veresy. Nor, mild, elderly country gentleman, would he have known how to riot, even had he the inclination. Yet apparently what Myrtilla had saved at the bung, he let out lavishly at the spigot.

Paula deciphered the letter and read and re-read it carefully. To woman of the world it told an old story. Unknown to Myrtilla, her father, afflicted by income-tax, rates, depreciation of securities, and such-like pestilences of the post-war world, had been speculating heavily. A groggy insurance company of which he was a director had collapsed and he had to obey the summons for unpaid-up shares. It was then, she gathered that Monte Dangerfield had sprung up like a god out of the Financial Machine. She had heard of Monte Dangerfield little to his advantage. She had met him and liked him even less than his reputation. To this moment she had been unaware that her father knew him. But her father was just the sort of man for whom Monte Dangerfield was always looking. And, being on the directorate of various stodgy or crippled companies, he was very easy to find.

She recalled the gentle pomposity with which he would announce his journey to London to attend a Board Meeting. Before it was pulled down, he always stayed at Burton's Hotel in Brook Street, because it was a gentleman's hotel, and the valet who had been there for thirty years knew his ways like his own man-servant. She used to picture the kindly, white-moustached ex-lieutenant of Dragoon Guards, sitting with other solemnities at a green leather table and listening to glib secretary and chairman rattling off figures of which he had not the least comprehension, and voting, with sturdy faith in authority,

as he had voted during a brief tenure of a seat in Parliament. And now, Monte Dangerfield had got hold of him and flashed Patagonian Eldorados before his impecunious eyes, and had raked in all the remaining money in the poor desperate gentleman's possession. There was swindling somehow, she felt sure; Monte Dangerfield indubitably had not lost by the crash of Patagonian Eldorados; and she was aware that he had taken good care to render himself immune from anything like criminal prosecution. She had but to face facts.

Apart from Mr. Veresy's change of fortune—as the prospective tenant of a flat in Putney he loomed a pathetic figure—there was also the cold horror of the passing of Chadford Park into the possession of the dreadful people who nowadays were buying up venerable seats; people who painted old oak panelling yellow and green to make it more cheerful-like, and chopped down secular trees and cut up sacred lawns in order to build garages adequate for their fleet of motor-cars and replaced mediæval donjons by casino wings in order to provide dancing halls for their young; defiled the place with agonizing vowel-sounds; wore diamond tiaras in their weekly baths; and broke the hearts of family butlers. Thus pessimistically ran Paula's thoughts under the pressure on her temples of fingers like those of Death.

She had taken it as a matter of course that Chadford Park would eventually go to her cousin, one Edward Veresy, now soldiering in Iraq. Fortunately or unfortunately, an ancient entail had been cut off some seventy years ago; but to dispose of it, by testament, other than to a Veresy had been a sacrilege beyond human contemplation. There was also a second-cousin, one Vincent Veresy, who was a house-master at one of the great public schools. There were other Veresys too, *de par le*

monde. Individually none were opulent; but couldn't they all club together and secure a Veresy (with heirs male of his body) as the occupant of Chadford Park? Something must be done; otherwise it would appear as though the Almighty who had cared for them for centuries, had suddenly grown too busy—certainly there had never been so complicated a world—to think of them any more and, in Gallic idiom, had planted them there. The Veresys God-forsaken at last! It was the sublimation of the forlorn.

And then, attendant on these soul-compelling sentiments, rode sordid personal anxiety. Her husband, gallant fellow, had left but little. That little had been doubled by her father's allowance; she had been forced to prudent management in order to keep up her flat in Hansel Mansions, dress becomingly and take her modest place in the world to which she belonged. Now, her income reduced by half, what could she do? She stared at a blank wall.

If a woman is an inconsiderable little person, she can, in such circumstances do many things. She can migrate from Knightsbridge to Turnham Green; she can run up her own little simple gowns; she can attune herself to whist-drives and other ingenuous pastimes of her neighbours. She can give inexpensive entertainments where the company sit on the floor while a young futurist makes the tea and a callow anarchist spreads the bread and butter. At a pinch she can strew the room with packets of gaspers and not care whether they are pocketed. Or she can take life very seriously and read Tolstoi and Nietzsche and Freud and Mrs. Sidney Webb, and throw herself into Movements and go about lecturing and grow very intense and raddled and interestingly discontented. Or she can betake herself to a dear little workman's cottage in

a Suffolk village, all chintz and hollyhocks, and marry the curate. There is no end to her potential activities. But for a woman of regal beauty, to whom queenly attire seems but an apanage of Nature, who has commanded since her entry into the world the world's ungrudging homage, the problem of poverty is not quite so simple.

Of course, she could continue her small literary career. But being out of society how could she contribute her social journalistic column? To attend parties professionally and chronicle the names of guests and the description of women's frocks and jewels was not within the realm of her philosophy. She had the pretty wit that shot folly as it flew; and she had to see it flying. She might also write another novel. . . . The ground-work for one had been in her head for some time. She sighed in despair. Her literary earnings, no matter from what point of view she considered them, were only pin-money —an evening dress and a hat or two and a necessary assortment of silk stockings.

To take Clara Demeter into counsel was to turn dubiety into the channels of exasperation. According to her, the only course of sanity would be to marry Pandolfo. But she didn't want to marry Pandolfo. He was too dynamic; in spite of fascinating childishness, much more a force than a human being. He had laid grip on everything in her save her heart. Both instinct and affection bade her take the first train to Chadford and support Myrtilla in the administration of filial comfort. But that would be flight from Pandolfo, against which her pride revolted.

Meanwhile common courtesy ordained a reply to the ham and battle telegram. She scribbled "Congratulations" on a form and sent it down to the concierge. Then she wondered whether Spencer would not be scared to death by the possibility of the divination of his secret

through her unguarded expression leading to the further disintegration of Europe. She laughed—and there was a tender quality in her laughter which surprised her. She had reached that stage of feminine philosophy which propounds the theory that no man, be his years ever so many, has ever grown up. Women mature into ripe wisdom, and childish things fall from them like withered blossoms; but the man, to change the metaphor, is never weaned from the bottle of his babyhood. What more irresponsible infant lived than her father? Had not her husband been the everlasting boy? What woman could exhibit, like Pandolfo, the turbulent vanity of extreme youth? What woman over thirty could seek mothering shelter with the mute pathos of the latest man to establish himself in her intimacy, Gregory Uglow? And finally, there was forty year old Spencer Babington creeping stealthily through the shrubbery and playing at Indians with the solemnity of an urchin of ten.

Dear, quaint, faithful old Spencer! She lay on her bed, wrapper-clad, preparatory to dressing for dinner, and smiled at her thoughts. What a name for a public-house: "The Ham and Battle." She was certain he had seen nothing funny in the incongruous juxtaposition. Perhaps in his complete unhumorousness lay his charm. She had always been fond of him in an elder sisterly sort of way, regarding him as a perpetual gentle joke. Life would lack some of its sunshine if there were no Spencer to laugh at. She smiled with indulgence at the memory of the maid's pyjama story.

Simkin, the maid in question, entered in pursuit of duty. What dress would Madame wear? Paula was brought back to brutal actuality. On twopence a year how could she afford the necessary Simkin, who had ministered to her wants from the far-off days preceding her

marriage. The prospect of losing her lowered peculiarly dismal. Simkin was part of herself. They had grown up together at Chadford, where John Simkin had been gardener, boy and man, for half a century, like his father before him. It was his proud boast that there had been Simkins at Chadford at least as long as there had been Veresys. There was a Simkin mentioned among the men-at-arms whom Godfrey de Veresy dragged after him to the Battle of Tewkesbury; so what clearer proof could one desire? Simkin—her un-lady's maid-like name was Gwendoline—was thin, sharp-featured, and ill-favoured, although precisely neat of her person, and, to Paula's peace of mind, she "did not hold with men." She was civil to them, as became her station; but she regarded them as inferior beings capable of little beyond the material disturbance of a woman's quiet life. If Paula loved them because they were children, on that very account were they distasteful to Simkin. She disliked children and dogs and soldiers and motor-cars and everything that made a noise. That she should be attendant on one of the young ladies of Chadford had been her childhood's ambition, her girlhood's achievement, the complete satisfaction of her womanhood. She loved Paula as far as respect allowed.

Paula, in the old aristocratic way, took this feudal attachment for granted. She too believed firmly in the secular ties of the Simkins to Chadford. There was something even stronger than blood in the bond between Simkin and herself. While Simkin dressed her, the thought occurred to her, with a tiny spasm of shock, that they were anachronisms in this world of changed values; that the two of them represented something very old, very rare, very precious; that their relations, could

they be materialized into some outer form, were fit to be preserved in some museum of prehistoric sociology. Dismissal of Simkin would be a rupture of two sacred traditions. It is true that Simkin had her faults. She was an inveterate gossip and would-be purveyor of tittle-tattle. She had scarcely a veiled contempt for the esoteric coquetry of woman's daintiness.

"I wouldn't wear these things," she would say, holding up diaphanieties, "not if you paid me." In some ways she was a trial. Yet Paula knew that should she choose, she could beat her with impunity about the head, just as Godfrey de Veresy in all probability beat the varlet who, without the remotest desire to win glory or to die, followed him to a sticky death on Tewkesbury Field.

"I've lost a lot of money, Simkin," said Paula suddenly.

"I'm very sorry, madam."

"I'm afraid we'll have to change our way of life."

"Very good, madam."

"I've heard of two nice cheap rooms over a butcher's shop in Islington."

"If you'd kindly keep still a moment, madam——"

"I'm afraid you wouldn't like the butcher's shop, Simkin."

"If it's agreeable to you, I'm sure it will be agreeable to me."

Paula swerved and stamped her foot with an impatient laugh.

"I'm talking seriously. Things have happened. I can't tell you about them yet. But it seems that the time's coming when I shan't be able to afford to have a personal maid."

The plain, pale face grew a shade paler.

"You can't be giving me notice, madam?"

"I'm only preparing you for the possibility. I want to know what you think about it."

Simkin busied herself with the folding up of garments, while her mistress gave a final polish to her nails.

"You've taken me all of a heap, Miss Paula," she said at last, using instinctively the old form of address. "I don't know what to say. All I know is that, if I left you because you couldn't afford to pay me the same wages, or any wages at all, if it comes to that, my father would cut me out of his will. He has a tidy sum of money laid by, and I'm the only child. I should be the loser in the long run."

"And foreigners say we English are an unemotional people!" said Paula. She went up to Simkin and touched her shoulder. A rare caress. Perhaps the only one since a day long ago, when in her agony, Simkin's arms had clasped her tight around, while she sobbed her heart out. "I hope it won't come to that, Gwennie; we'll try to stick together."

Here, on the face of it, judged according to modern standards, was the most inconsiderable complication in the world. The economical sacrifice of a personal maid, *per se,* cannot wring a tear of sympathy from the most tender-hearted and sentimental. As well waste sensibility on a toy Pomeranian whom a cruel fate deprives of the white meat of chicken. But, in the case of Paula Field, the possible sacrifice was a Symbol of the passing away of an old order of things in which she was shocked to discover the roots of her being. She who went about the modern world, as far as her general consciousness was concerned, a modern among the moderns, found herself suddenly thrown back on the rudimentary instincts of a feudal aristocracy. For, apart from the natural affection

for a woman who had been her devoted servant since childhood, was the passionate and despairing grip on all the messages of the centuries and their meaning in her evolution.

Gregory Uglow, invited from his lonely table during Pandolfo's invalidom, by a kindly Clara Demeter, joined them at dinner. Paula, woman of the world, was all smiles and graciousness.

"I have a message from Sir Victor," said the young man. "He has insisted on having his bed wheeled into the sitting-room. I'm to say that, won't the ladies have the sweet charity—those were his words"—Gregory smiled —"to drink their coffee with him upstairs."

"Why, of course, poor dear man, we shall be delighted," cried Lady Demeter.

He turned for confirmation to Paula. What could she do, out of common (to say nothing of sweet) charity, but assent?

They went up after dinner. The open window commanded view of new moon coyly peeping over mountain-tops. The room was an extravagant bower of roses. A pallid waiter stood over the coffee cups. On the sideboard were ranged the bottles of the hotel's supply of liqueurs. Little, shy, blue-uniformed Nurse Williams stood by the jamb of the window. Pandolfo lay, of necessity, flat on his back; and, as far as the turned sheets disclosed, was clad in a wonderful red and gold brocaded bed-jacket.

"You don't know what a job I had to get him into it," whispered Nurse Williams, during the course of the visit.

He out-Pandolfo'd Pandolfo in his welcome. Spoke Shakespearianly of the bright eyes of ladies raining influence and proclaimed his wresting from a management not over-conversant with its cellar, the last bottle of their

genuine old green Chartreuse. Triumphantly he made the waiter exhibit the tiny lithographer's imprint on the label, away down on the right-hand bottom corner—"Allier Grenoble." Anything in the world could be got, he declared, if you took enough trouble.

"But suppose there really had been none?" asked Paula.

"I never suppose such things," he flashed. "I work on axioms, not hypotheses."

He developed the thesis, talking picturesquely. After that, he made wild projects for a tour of France and Italy—the whole company there assembled, including Nurse Williams, who could go to Bodmin afterwards. Especially did he long to satisfy a yearning to see at Ravenna the paintings of one Luca Longhi, a famous fellow who, he was sure, had suffered ages of neglect. Poor Luca shouldn't be judged by his saints and lute-playing angel in the Louvre. A lame dog of an old painter, whom he wanted to help over a stile. He spoke with so proselytizing a zeal that all fell under his spell. Ravenna became the Mecca of their dreams and the Cathedral the tomb of the Prophet Luca Longhi.

"It would be lovely!" cried Clara Demeter.

"I've never been on a motor tour," sighed Nurse Williams.

"Don't you think the mere word 'Italy' has a fascination for one who has never been there?" said Gregory Uglow.

"Why not go to Rimini—not far off?" asked Paula quietly.

"Why not? Yet why?"

"It's most interesting. I went there as a girl. It's the home of the Great Pandolfo—the Malatesta."

He shot out a vivid and disconcerting hand: "We shall; if such be your pleasure. And we'll buy a palazzo

—and a Pandolfo will run Rimini again." Suddenly he snapped his fingers and drummed on his forehead like a man recalling memories. "Yes, I'm right. I know I'm right. I can visualize the page of the book—Yriarte—I never forget. Do you remember the name of the wife of him whom you call the Great Pandolfo?"

"Of course not. How should I?"

"It was Paola—Paola Bianca——" He clasped both his hands behind his head on the pillow, and regarded her triumphantly. She looked aside in confusion. Against this man gibes fell powerless, like india-rubber tipped arrows. Perhaps, more like boomerangs coming back unexpectedly to hit her. For a crazy moment she felt herself the butt of all kinds of idiot dooms and destinies.

Clara broke the situation:

"I'm sure, Sir Victor, you're making that up."

"Come to Rimini and see for yourself. There's a tomb——"

"Oh, now you're horrid. Our dear Paula hasn't the least desire to be preserved in marble."

Paula rose. "I'm going to be preserved in lavender. I've had an S.O.S. call to-day from Chadford. Yes, really, Clara. I must get home as soon as I can find a seat on a train——"

"My dear—your father?——"

"I must help Myrtilla."

"Who's Myrtilla?" asked Pandolfo.

"My sister."

"And your father—is he ill—dying——?"

"He needs my help," said Paula.

The watchful nurse sprang to the bedside and laid capable hands on the shoulders of the vehement man who was about to spring up regardless of delicately healing

ribs. He submitted but pushed her aside impetuously, and bent his clear eyes on Paula.

"Illness is a private affair between God and doctors. I wouldn't presume to interfere. But in anything else, your help is my help. Believe yourself—and tell him if you like—that the spiritual, if not the physical descendant of the great Pandolfo whose wife was Paola Bianca, is a rock of defence."

Lady Demeter came up, with anxious face.

"What's this that you've sprung upon us? What's it all about?"

Paula pulled herself together—resenting her betrayal of feminine nerves—and laughed. She obeyed the inspiration of a Devil of Defiance.

"Forgive me if I've been a bit off my balance. But the dear old thing—that's my father—has written me the most exciting news. They've discovered that the richest coal-mine in the West County runs under Chadford Park. He's half off his head with joy. It means that we'll be millionaires and that I'll be able to satisfy my life's ambition and buy a moated grange and live there all alone and fade gradually into lilac silk and die in the odour of lavender. Now you know." She swerved, smiling to Pandolfo. "I thank you, Sir Victor, for your offer—but I don't think my father would need your help in running a coal-field."

He smiled luminously and ironically. "There, my dear," said he—she winced at the word's possessive familiarity—"is where you make a mistake. There's nothing in the world which a professional cannot run better than an amateur. Put your father into touch with me."

"And with Demeter," cried Clara, "there's a fortune in it for everybody."

"Except for me," said Pandolfo seriously. "It would

be an outrage if I contemplated the gain of a penny. I give, I do not sell to our dear lady."

There was the gift, thundering upon her avalanche-wise, of all his genius and magnetic power in the development of this mythological coal-field discovered in some perverse kink of her brain. Lunatic, as it might appear, he believed her story. And why not? Had she not told it—trained social actress that she was—in the most natural way in the world? She was conscious of a clash of talk between Clara and Pandolfo, Clara prevailing. Nurse Williams sat on a straight-backed chair honestly staring, open-mouthed. Gregory Uglow leaned forward scientifically interested.

"It's all in the air—a coal-field in the air——" she laughed nervously. "So you see I must go home and explore it."

"As soon as these confounded ribs are stuck together, I'll come and explore it with you."

"By aëroplane," said Paula. "Good night."

A while later she had an aghast and profoundly shocked Lady Demeter staring at her.

"And not a word of truth in it?"

"Not a word."

The bewildered lady proclaimed her amazing and asked the reason for this monstrous invention. Paula fenced. At last she spoke desperately.

"The man has got on my nerves. I can't stand it. I'm not going to be stuck in a marble tomb with him forty years hence—to say nothing of the intervening period. Yes. I'm a coward if you like. I give up the struggle. I'll run away. Can I have the use of your car to-morrow? Oh—not to dash off to safety"—she laughed at her friend's disconcerted face—"only to Aix. I've promised the little nurse to get her a trousseau—at Pandolfo's ex-

pense. If he wants to give, I'll teach him how to do it. I must keep my engagement before I leave, mustn't I? That'll fill up to-morrow. The day after I'm for home. As for his ribs—you and the young man can look after them. The point is—can I have the car?"

"Of course, my dear, with pleasure. And by the way, you can take over a little parcel for Spencer Babington. It came by to-night's post. It's some nice silk and wool bed-socks like Frank's. I promised to get him some the last time he came over."

Paula bit her lips, clenched her hands behind her, and looked down on the kind and comfortable lady.

"I've had enough to try me to-day, Clara," she said. "My hump's at the breaking-point. Don't throw on the last straw. I'll take Spencer Babington guns or motor-cycles, or skates or absinthe or anarchist literature or anything of that sort you like, but I'll see you and everybody else in Hades before I'll take him bed-socks."

"But why——?"

"Because," said Paula, "I'm going over to-morrow to tell him that I'll marry him."

CHAPTER IX

In uniform Nurse Williams feared neither man nor devil. She would have put ice on a crowned head or taken the temperature of a murderer injured in pursuit of his calling with equal unconcern. But in her inconspicuous mufti, she became a shy and provincial person. Supported by Paula, who had forewarned, by telephone, the invalids of Aix of their coming, she had sat through luncheon rather thrilled and entirely demure. She would have a tale to tell in Bodmin of her ex-professional rubbing of shoulders with the aristocracy. She treasured scraps of their talk from which, her hosts being courteous gentlemen, she was rarely excluded. But it was a different matter when, the meal over, they passed from the hotel salle à manger, into the leafy terrace-garden, and Paula, to all intents and purposes, told her to go and play with Lord Demeter, while she herself dragged off Sir Spencer Babington to a remote bay of the parapet.

Lord Demeter had said: "The view over the valley and the lake is magnificent."

To which Paula had replied: "You've seen it all for the last hour, from the dining-room window. Miss Williams is fainting for coffee and *crême de menthe* which don't appeal to me and are bad for Spencer's health."

And she had walked Sir Spencer Babington off as aforesaid, leaving the odd couple planted there beneath the chequered shade of the sycamores. A hurrying waiter set chairs at a little table and took the orders.

"I hope," said Lord Demeter, in his timid, mouse-like way, "you're not a celebrated person, Miss Williams."

The little nurse jumped: "Who—I? Hasn't Mrs.

Field told you? I'm only an ordinary professional nurse."

Lord Demeter beamed. "I'm so glad. My wife's friends are all such famous people. One never knows whether one is talking to an astronomer or a poet or a prominent lady Bolshevist. I find it dreadfully confusing." He looked at her with humorous suspicion. "You never go to Buckingham Palace covered all over with medals, do you?"

"Oh dear, no," laughed Nurse Williams, in spite of her trepidation at being left alone at the terrible mercy of a peer of the realm.

"Then there's a hope of our becoming really friendly. But tell me—you're not attending on Lady Demeter?"

She liked him for the note of anxiety in his voice. She longed to give him the assurance that Lady Demeter was as strong as a cart horse, but she thought it would not be respectful. She explained Pandolfo's mountain accident. Lord Demeter remembered some account of it in a letter from his wife. He had remarked to Babington, at the time, that it would keep the fellow quiet.

"I don't envy you your task," said he.

She asked why.

"From what I've seen of him, it must be like nursing a whole Zoölogical Gardens."

She laughed: the ice was broken. Thenceforward they got on famously. She found the real live lord pleasant and human. Instinct focussed them on a common joy in flowers, the only thing she missed in her nursing career. Her father, in his small way, was a noted amateur gardener. Lord Demeter confessed a passion for the growing of sweet peas. It was her father's hobby. At all the flower shows through Cornwall and even Devon he was unrivalled. There was one of which he was particularly

proud—the colour of sunburnt peach. Lord Demeter leaned forward in excitement.

"He's not by any chance the grower of 'The Fairy Dream'?"

He was. Lord Demeter leaned back with arms extended in mock despair.

"Then you *are* celebrated. It's my dreadful fate never to meet anyone that isn't."

She thought him the delightfullest, kindest, simplest little man on earth; which perhaps he was, and wherefore Clara Demeter adored him. Her shy tongue was unloosened. She told him all about Bodmin and the war hospital in Salonika and the magnificent ways of Sir Victor Pandolfo. She also grew very confidential, leaning across the cane table, cheek on hand, while he listened, amused, in similar attitude, so that they gave to all beholders the impression of a pair more than politely interested in each other's company. But she was only telling Pandolfo's love story; how he slithered about the surface of precipices in order to gather a rubbishy little blue flower for Mrs. Field and how he had declared without any reservation, that he was going to marry her.

"And do you think she will?" he asked.

Nurse Williams nodded sagely. "She'll have to. He's one of those people who get everything they want in the world. It isn't a question of money, although he seems to be awfully rich. But he'd get everything just the same if he was quite poor. Do you understand what I mean?"

Lord Demeter shook a sorry head. He did understand. The fellow had walked off with an Italian picture of his which he didn't want to sell, at half the price it would have fetched at Christie's. A genuine Sassoferrato with an authentic pedigree from the painter's brush. If he wanted a woman——

"He's bound to get her," cried Nurse Williams.

Lord Demeter rose, for Paula and Spencer Babington suddenly came up to their table. She stood superb in a gown of light autumn leaf which toned with her rich colouring. The lean Spencer stood sphinx-like by her side.

"Don't get up. Spencer will find chairs." A wave dismissed him on the errand. "You're the first to hear the glad news, Frank. Spencer has once more asked me to marry him and now I'm going to."

Lord Demeter screwed up his face into a myriad wrinkles of incredulity and within the limit sanctioned by good manners pointed a finger at the chair-hunting swain.

"Marry Spencer?"

"Yes."

"But, my dear, he—he knows nothing at all about it——"

"He must, seeing that he asked Mrs. Field," cried Nurse Williams, stricken with loss of romantic glamour.

"That isn't at all what I mean," cried Demeter.

"What *do* you mean, Frank?" asked Paula calmly.

The little man put hands to a bewildered head in which for years past had been stored a Manual of the Whole Duty and Deportment of Husbands. The expert looked aghast at the untried and also unpromising amateur. By the time Spencer arrived, presenting the chairs in his dignified manner as if they were protocols, he had recovered. He offered urbane congratulations. Spencer smiled and fingered his eyeglass.

"Very kind indeed of you, my dear fellow." He linked his arm gallantly in Paula's. "From my point of view no congratulations could possibly be adequate."

The phrase summoned a responsive flush of pleasure into Paula's cheek. The last hour had brought curious realization of her conception of him at his best. The

petty foibles and vanities at which she had always laughed, had vanished for the moment when she had given him to understand her preparedness to reconsider her manifold decisions. She had been deadly frank with him —so was she self-assured. But the deadliness of a woman's frankness lies in her secret store of the unrevealed. She laid, as she thought, her cards on the table. She scorned false pretences. She admitted the casting vote of the mercenary motive. Fortunately she was able to give him chapter and verse for the Chadford Park disaster, for she had received by the first post that morning a letter from the hard-headed Myrtilla which filled with snaggy and rocky detail her father's impressionistic picture of catastrophe.

Said she, more or less, during the course of a none too easy conversation:

"I've been fond of you, in a way, for heaven knows how many years. No woman has ever had a more loyal and devoted friend. Or lover." She granted the word at a sign of protest. "I know you've loved me all these long, long years, and I've always felt myself to be the most selfish and ungrateful woman in the world. But it has been a question of you and my independence. And my independence has prevailed. Now my independence has gone up in the air and you swing down in the balance. I don't love you, in the romantic way of love"—this, be it understood, is but a précis or résumé of an incidental duologue—"but for no other man have I such a high regard. . . ."

"All these long years to which you have referred," said he, "I have asked for nothing but the gift of yourself."

Naturally, to tell the artless story backwards, his renewed proposal had followed her tale of catastrophe and preceded her frank capitulation. There were no crudi-

ties in Paula's conduct of life. She carried the situation with what, in man, is termed urbanity. When she began—lounging with him over the circular bay of the parapet—Spencer Babington had no notice of a woman's mind made up. He walked at once into the path somewhat disdainfully prepared. Thus she met him on her own ground. As above narrated, she felt that she had bared her soul to him; there was nothing withheld that in the future might be the subject of reproach or even of remonstrance.

And yet the name of Victor Pandolfo never passed her lips.

It was Spencer himself, who, later, after the great announcement to Lord Demeter and Nurse Williams, alluded to the disturbing man.

"I confess, my dear, I've been worried by that fellow Pandolfo. He pursues you, never seems to let you alone. I did not mind so much—to employ a figure of speech—your not marrying me, but—forgive a disequilibrated mind for contemplating such a possibility—your marriage with him would have caused me profound mortification."

"I'm glad, my dear Spencer, that you apologize for hinting at such an absurdity."

"But you must look at things from my point of view," Babington persisted, eager to justify himself. "I don't deny that, in many ways, I detest Pandolfo. He has ninety per cent of the qualities in man that I most dislike. I grant—I am nothing if not scrupulously fair—a ten per cent of attraction. He is free-handed, large-minded, and I bow to him as an authority on post-Raphaelite Italian art. But he is the greatest egotist I have ever met. That human failing, my dearest Paula, as a long intimacy must have proved to you, is to me the most repulsive and unforgivable. He lives up to one creed—pardon the ap-

parent profanity for the sake of its appositeness. 'I believe in Pandolfo the Father, Pandolfo the Son, and Pandolfo' etcetera. His entire horizon is informed with the essence or spirit of Pandolfo. . . . Well, perhaps a woman might not have a man's clear vision in such a case. I throw myself at your feet for my unworthy and agonized speculations. Even the best, the most beautiful, the most brilliant of women have succumbed to the glamour of the adventurer."

Paula said drily: "Why should you call him an adventurer? You've just said that you prided yourself on being fair. Clara assures me that he belongs to the old Italian nobility."

Spencer held out his be-ribboned eyeglass.

"I know. Merchant princes. Ice-cream barrows. Or artists. Barrel-organs and monkeys."

Paula, remembering Pandolfo's one autobiographical sentence, clutched his arm.

"Do you know that as a fact? Do you know anything about his antecedents?"

"I don't," he admitted. "I was only expressing feelings. I was uncharitable, which was wrong—especially at a moment such as this."

"That's one thing I like about you, Spencer—your sense of justice."

He said drily gallant: "I hope there are others."

She made laughing answer to which he responded. He was obviously very happy. His unbending loverwise caused her both gratification and amusement. He had unsuspected possibilities which, for development needed only a woman's guiding hand: an uncultivated garden, so to speak, responsive to patient and generous care.

He asked her: "Why didn't you give me this happiness years ago?"

"My dear Spencer," said she, "you are one of the people who don't burst upon a woman, but grow upon her. The safest kind."

Later again, he announced his intention of accompanying her to Rênes-les-Eaux. Could he have place in the car for himself, suit-case, and man—the last having secured rooms by telephone? How could he live now, sixty miles away?

"I'm doing it away from a real wife," said Lord Demeter, who felt somewhat aggrieved at the prospect of shy loneliness; "so I don't see why—well——"

Delicacy checked the flow of his argument. He could only present himself as a forlorn yet spartan figure. Spencer Babington waxed sprightly. There was nothing, said he, like the selfishness of a spoilt husband. It would have done Frank good to be a bachelor for forty years.

"If you imagine you're going to be spoilt like Frank," said Paula, "we had both better cry off at once."

It was all very pretty, light, and charming. The car drove off as on a modern voyage to Cythera. In spite of Spencer Babington's polite persuasion, plain little Nurse Williams insisted on occupying one of the small, spare seats and on swinging it round so that she could get the fullest advantage of the scenery. In delicious contentment she gripped a little parcel, containing a dozen separate square inches of expensive rubbish which the feminine brain queerly identifies as handkerchiefs—a gift from Lord Demeter, who had dashed in search of some harmless vanity into the vanity shop along the corridor of the hotel. It had been a red-letter day in her life. She had held her own, made good, as the phrase goes, not as a nurse—to that she was accustomed—but as a pleasant human woman. She was all of a glow—and the most

sweet and innocent glow in the world. Men do not realize the joy that a starved woman derives from the tiniest gift of themselves. And it is only the simple-hearted, like Frank Demeter, who give it instinctively.

Mrs. Field and Sir Spencer might have made the most furious love together in the back seat behind her, and she wouldn't have cared. She had never purred in such delicate rapture in her life. Esther Williams had found herself as a social personage.

Meanwhile the newly engaged pair did not, by any means, cause the road-bounding trees to turn aside modestly or the skies to blush, at any amorous phenomena. Once he took her hand.

"Do you know, my dear Paula, I haven't yet had the opportunity of kissing you."

Said she, with a laugh, "You have kissed me at least a dozen times in our lives."

"I know," said he. "Could I ever forget? But it has been a question of privilege—old friendship. They have been dealt out, one by one, through many years. The first was when you wore pigtails and it was your thanks, somewhat impulsive, for a box of chocolates. There were others which were only consolation prizes."

"If you grow so pathetic, you'll make me cry," said Paula. "Look at those violet shadows on the mountains. Aren't they wonderful?"

"What are violet mountains to me at the present moment?"

His black-ribboned monocle waved them dismissal.

"That was nicely put," she said. "But, all the same, don't you think you've lost quite an opportunity?"

He bent round courteously: "I don't quite catch——?"

"Why didn't you say: 'Damn the violet mountains?' "

"I suppose I'm rather old-fashioned," he replied stiffly, resenting the implied criticism.

She caught him by the arm, seeing that he was ruffled. "What in the name of common sense is the use of being old-fashioned in a new-fashioned world?"

"The old stands for dignity, respect . . . honour of women. . . ."

"But what's 'old'? Pull yourself together, my dear. As Napoleon said in front of the Sphinx. 'The Centuries are regarding us.' Do you mean 1820, 1720, 1420, two million and twenty B. C. when you would, without any shadow of doubt, split open my exasperating head with a stone hatchet? The further I go back, the less honour I see paid to women. We're living in the nineteen-twenties, people of our own generation, expressing in some sort of blind instinctive way, the spirit of our own generation. It's lunatic for a young man like you to declare himself old-fashioned. Why limit yourself, as I feel you do, to Queen Victoria? Why not imitate the colossal asses of the modern world who go about Paris with horrid bare toes in the costume of the Ancient Greeks?"

Said he: "I appreciate what you say, my dear Paula. But how would you—in broad terms, of course—define modernity?"

She knitted a perplexed brow. Was ever woman on voyage to Cythera, confronted with a problem so metaphysical, sociological, psychological?

In amused desperation she said:

"We're crisp, at any rate."

"Crisp?"

She nodded, while he seemed to revolve the word round his brain.

"I'm afraid, my dear Paula, I've been trained in diplomacy. Diplomacy is never crisp."

"Wait till you get me out to Czecho-Slovakia," she said.

And, a minute or two afterwards: "May I again draw your attention to the violet shadows? Just look at them. Don't talk."

They wound their way through the enchanted valley. The afternoon sun bathed the eastern slopes in glory. The ripe cornfields shone like gold. From hill-embosomed villages of red and russet rose the copper cupola of the church flaming beaconwise. The western mountain sides lay in infinite grades of shadow from pale grey to the intense violet that had caught at Paula's heart. Crimson and purple quivered over the face of quarries. Here and there the crumbling ruin of a seigneurial stronghold caught the sun and gleamed triumphant. Flashing or sinister, according to the magic of the light, the thin cascades leaped precipitously from the heights into the milky Isère flowing by the roadside with a Gallic assumption of turbulence. In sunshine and shadow, on hill or in strip of plain, the kindly earth gave fulfilment of its promise of fruitfulness. Cattle grazed in deep pasture to the melody of bells. Brown-eyed children herded goats. Often the pleasant country-folk waved a greeting. They passed the gigantic cliff whose silhouette bears so remarkable a resemblance to the human face that it is called the Tête du Géant. And every now and then against the pale blue of the sky, appeared the pale dead glimmer of the eternal hills of Switzerland.

Once, emotion conquering discretion, Nurse Williams swerved round on her swivel-chair.

"It's all so beautiful, Mrs. Field, I feel I want to cry."

Paula laid a caressing touch on her shoulder and smiled her comprehension. The girl, quite happy, betook herself to her rapt contemplation.

"What would you say if I burst into tears too?" asked Paula.

Spencer Babington replied urbanely—perhaps in the adverb's primitive sense: "Oh—I quite admit the effect of Nature on the—er—sentiments. Wordsworth and Peter Bell and the primrose by a river's brim. I'm afraid there are a lot of Peter Bells in the world."

"Dreadful people, aren't they?"

"Quite," said Spencer Babington.

They talked no more that day about natural scenery.

CHAPTER X

"If you want help," said Lady Demeter, "don't come to me for it."

She washed her hands free from all complicity in the drama which she feared was about to be enacted. She lived an unruffled, comfortable life, directress of unruffled, comfortable things. As a husband, or even as a lover, the shadowy and devoted Demeter sufficed her; as a wife, not only was she beyond reproach, a model of great and virtuous dames, but she also adored, for his delicate and exquisite qualities, the little man to whom she was married. Of course, as people said, she wore the breeches, to say nothing of jack-boots and spurs. But if he didn't mind, what did it matter? The spurs were ornamental. The mere suggestion of rowels would have gored her generous heart. The pair had lived together in a mutual understanding almost spiritually idyllic, since their marriage as girl and somewhat elderly boy. Storm and tempest and other clash of elements had never come within the sphere of her sheltered being. She loved her social position as entertainer of entertaining lions. In their strangeness lay safety. At a hint of inter-leonine complications, the doors of Hinsted were closed to the parties concerned. So, in accordance with principle, she announced to Paula her Pilate-like attitude.

But announcement of intention and its execution are two different things. She loved Paula very dearly. Besides, Paula, except perhaps decoratively, wasn't a lion. She couldn't shoo her away and bid her quarrel elsewhere. Also, she was very angry with her; especially when Paula replied, superb and ironical:

"I don't see, my dear Clara, in what way I can possibly need your assistance."

"Who is going to tell Pandolfo and wrestle with him when he knows?"

Paula shrugged her shoulders.

"For everyone his own business. It's not mine and it certainly isn't yours."

"But it *will* be mine," cried the indignant lady. "He'll bring the hotel down about my ears, like the man in the Bible—Samson, I think. You'll be safely away on your return to England to-morrow, while I'm tied here to finish my cure."

"All you've got to say to him," replied Paula, "is, 'My dear man, go out and rave at rocks and torrents; don't rave at me, I've nothing to do with it!' "

"But I've a lot to do with it," cried Lady Demeter. "Do you suppose I haven't been bored stiff, listening to him talking about you? He has taken it for granted that I'm his ally."

"It's because he takes everything for granted, that I have no use for him," said Paula.

Lady Demeter, in spite of figurative washing of hands, let herself go, feeling herself to be a woman outraged in all her instincts and sensibilities. The hardness of nails, she declared, was as nothing compared with the concrete petrifaction of Paula's disposition. The day's happenings had entirely revolutionized her conception of Paula's character. She would say nothing of the splendid and worldly side of things; the fantastic fortune with which everyone credited Pandolfo. Nor of the genuinely romantic: one of the great chivalrous figures of the modern world laying all that woman could wish for at her feet. What was Spencer Babington giving her? Nothing. In the ordinary way she liked Spencer, a sort of elegant bit

of human Sheraton to have about the drawing-room. That was his outside. In reality he was one of those horrid things with tentacles drawing everything within reach unto himself. Oh, he had enough money, of course; but she was not speaking of money or of romance. It was a mere question of playing the game. Paula was not playing the game. Paula hotly demanded explanation. Clara retorted that she might at least have waited until the ribs which Pandolfo had broken in her service were mended and he was physically fit to come down and throw Spencer Babington into the river.

"I'm ashamed of you," she cried. "It isn't fair. Don't you see you're hitting a man when he's down?"

"I don't intend to hit him when he's up. The engagement won't be made public yet awhile. I want to see first what is happening at Chadford."

"Do you suppose Nurse Williams isn't telling him all about it at the present moment?"

"I asked her not to, and Spencer made it a special point with Frank not to mention the engagement to anyone."

"You're a pair of awful cowards, both of you," exclaimed Lady Demeter. "You're frightened to death of Pandolfo. I've a good mind to tell him myself; and I would if I weren't afraid he would burst his poor dear ribs all over again. Imagine Spencer breaking his ribs for anybody! Oh! I've no patience with you. I'm not coming down to dinner. I'll have a plate of cold ham in my room. You and Spencer can have a tender *tête-à-tête* meal. And if that nice boy Gregory Uglow comes along, you can hiss him away like the two wicked, selfish, cowardly geese that you are!"

And she bounced, not without dignity, out of the room, banging the door behind her.

Paula, speechless from indignation, dressed for her engagement dinner. Her indignation was directed against her friend's blatant hostility; her speechlessness was accounted for by the dismal consciousness, that in some specious way, Clara had right on her side. Actually, though not intentionally (she had never given the matter a thought) she had shirked issues. The man over whom she had triumphed, lay broken-ribbed on his bed—and broken-ribbed, although through his own idiot fault, yet after all, for the sake of her beautiful eyes—and therefore powerless to attack or defend. She swore to herself—and the silent process caused such swervings and jerks of body as to make difficult the simplest of Simkin's personal tasks—that her course of action would have been the same no matter in what splendid health of the raging lion, Pandolfo might have found himself. That was the worst of these placid sentimental women like Clare Demeter; they correlated everything with their fixed idea; they attributed base motives with the pitilessness that comes from lack of understanding; and yet they had the diabolical faculty of finding out one little loose joint in human armour and digging away into it with incredible joy.

Dressed, she flung into Lady Demeter's room, where the latter was already beginning her solitary meal.

It was monstrous of Clara to bring such accusations. The man was becoming an obsession. The broken-rib appeal to sentiment was nothing but blackmail. He had been making her life a misery for the past two months. The thing had to stop. She had stopped it by engaging herself to a man who had been devoted to her for years. A distinguished man. A man about to be made an ambassador. A man in their own sphere of life. Not a sort of Casanovanic adventurer. An old Italian family!

The Pandolfo Malatesta of Rimini! Where was Clara's common sense? He rose literally from the gutter. He had told her himself. His father was a grinning Italian who hawked a tray of plaster casts about the streets of London. Yes, the gutter; walking in the gutter on the wrong side of the kerb-stone.

"I can't see what difference that makes to your treatment of Pandolfo as he is," said Lady Demeter stonily.

Paula moved angrily to the door. Even the stateliest of women have been known to lose their temper.

"You're hopeless. You're Bolshevist. You'll be standing next as a Socialist candidate for Parliament, on the Clyde."

Spencer Babington met her, urbanely, at the foot of the stairs. His black-ribboned eyeglass, held between finger and thumb, pointed to the hall clock.

"To the very minute. What a wonderful woman you are."

Her nerves were still jangling. "Do you find common politeness rare in women?"

"Punctuality is said to be the politeness of kings," he replied.

"And diplomacy is the science of evasion."

"I would not go as far as that, my dear," said he.

"I wonder how far you would go?"

"At the present moment, with your consent, to the dining-room."

She laughed and forgave him. How was he, poor old Spencer, to guess the exacerbated state into which Clara Demeter had put her?

They crossed a deserted drawing-room, which opened into the restaurant. At the door stood Gregory Uglow, waiting for the ladies who had graciously allowed him to sit at their table. She made the necesssary introduction.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Uglow. Lady Demeter is not very well to-night. Oh, nothing! Only the cure is rather strenuous, isn't it? So she is dining upstairs—and Sir Spencer is carrying me off to dine with him. How is Sir Victor to-day?"

The young man laughed—and when he laughed, a gleam of amusement shone in his mild eyes.

"He's getting on fairly, Mrs. Field. But a wounded lion is not to be recommended as the most patient of invalids."

Later when they had sat down, "I should call him a wounded rhinoceros," said Spencer.

"Need we talk of him?" asked Paula rather sharply.

He raised his eyebrows ever so little in surprise. He had seen her in various manifestations: tragic, bantering, tender, ironical, enthusiastic, downright . . . ; but he had never seen her frankly ill-tempered.

Soon, however, she regained control of angered nerves and put on a smiling face. They talked of Prague. The present minister would be retiring in about three months. Spencer would have that breathing space, that time for preparation, for acquiring at least a superficial knowledge of the language. It was absurd for a minister not to be able to read the names of the streets or recognize allusions to himself in the local press or say "how d'ye do?" Besides that sort of thing always made a good impression, showed the people to whom you were accredited that you took some interest in them. There would be also time, if such a course met with Paula's approval, for them to be comfortably married and have the usual holiday before plunging into hard work.

"It would take me nearly that time to put my affairs in order and get a Czecho-Slovakian accent. Also an outfit," said Paula.

"Yes, doubtless," said he. "Thank you for reminding me. I've had so many things to consider to-day. Of course, all your dresses are very beautiful. But I see that you'll need a new stock. It's a question of British prestige. In fact, of regaining what we've lost. These things may appear trivialities; but they're not. I too, must see about getting a new diplomatic uniform."

"And a new Rolls-Royce with the very latest thing in bodies."

"I'm very fond of my old Napier—not so very old—three years. It's a marvellous car."

"But it wouldn't have the prestige in Praguish eyes of a brand new Rolls," said Paula.

And he replied in all seriousness that doubtless she was right. He smiled in his wintry, courteous way.

"You see, from the very beginning how, not only useful, but necessary you will be to me."

They were sitting, after dinner, on the terrace, the golden weather still giving its nights of scented velvet, when Gregory Uglow came up, with ever so slight an apologetic gesture.

"Please forgive me, Mrs. Field, but I'm under orders. Sir Victor asks me to say that he would regard it as a great favour if you would go up to him for five minutes so that he can thank you for your kindness to Nurse Williams."

She gave him as graciously worded message of refusal as lay in her power. The young man bowed and went off.

"The rhinoceros again—always charging in between us," said Spencer Babington.

"It's his way," said Paula wearily. From no point of view had her evening been a success—or her afternoon, for the matter of that.

"A confoundedly impudent way," he declared. "It if hadn't been for that charmingly mannered young man, I should have intervened and insisted on your sending him quite a different type of answer. But he's a gentleman. Anyone can see it. What's he doing in Pandolfo's galley?"

"Oh, cooking for him—as so many gentlemen have to do these days."

Between narrowed eyelids she watched his face lit by the pale glow of the hotel lights, but not irradiated by a gleam of recognition of her somewhat bitter little witticism. He only nodded sententious approval of a sociological proposition. She said:

"Spencer, tell me. When is a door not a door?"

He jumped up. "My dear, do you feel a draught?" He looked around. "But how can you, in the open air? Still, if you'd like me to shut the lounge door"—some five yards away—"I'll do so with pleasure."

"Please do. Those people are chattering so," said Paula, his muddle-headed solicitude moving her to repentance. And when he came back—"Do tell me more about Bohemia."

"Czecho-Slovakia, nowadays," he corrected.

"But I love Bohemia, with its sea coast and its Latin Quarter and its caravans and its Café Royal. I've never been there, unfortunately, but I think they must laugh a lot there."

Again the wintry smile. "I envy you your wonderful faculty of twisting things into a jest. It is part of your fascination."

"Do you think it will come in useful in Czecho-Slovakia?"

"Doubtless," said he. "Without a sense of humour a diplomatist is lost."

Presently, up again comes an obviously reluctant Gregory.

"Mrs. Field—you know what he is. He has something of the utmost importance to tell you. I'm to say it's about Chadford Park—your old home which you were so good as to describe to me a few nights ago. He is very excited. He has one of his ideas. The nurse is afraid of temperatures and things."

Spencer Babington rose and, with a repressive sideways sign to Paula, addressed the young man with exceeding courtesy.

"Will you be so good as to convey my compliments, Sir Spencer Babington's compliments, to Sir Victor, and inform him that what concerns Mrs. Field concerns me also. I shall be very happy to wait on him at any hour he suggests in the morning to discuss what I presume are business matters connected with Chadford Park. And that my reason for assuming this responsibility is that this afternoon Mrs. Field did me the honour of promising to be my wife."

The last words of this ponderous announcement caused Gregory Uglow to be guilty of a perceptible start. Recovering himself, he inclined his head coldly to Babington and turned to Paula.

"May I have one minute?"

"As many as you please."

"I shall wait here for you," said Spencer, drawing a cigar from his case.

"Naturally," murmured Paula. What other course in the wide world could he pursue? Really, Spencer was the Master of Platitude, the Arch-Priest of the Obvious. She touched the young man's arm. "Come along."

They stepped aside and walked towards the end of the hotel verandah.

"I know I oughtn't to think of myself, Mrs. Field," said Gregory; "but I must. I'm in a delicate position. I'm in Sir Victor's confidence, if you can call confidential what he proclaims to everybody. I've just been admitted, by Sir Spencer, for the first time into yours. Please help me —tell me what to do."

"You heard Sir Spencer's message."

"I did. But what do you think would happen if I delivered it?"

"Surely that's not my affair, Mr. Uglow. You know you're rather Shakespearian."

Her desperate annoyance was tempered with whimsical irritation. No sooner had the master been more or less uncomfortably put out of the way than the man came to pester on his behalf, playing Viola to her Olivia.

"I think I've already made my apology," said he.

In the faint light their eyes met. His were very frank and honest and soft. She yielded.

"Tell me what you would like me to do—within reason —and, for your sake, I'll do it."

Every woman, from Queen to slut has the instinctive knowledge of the sex-appeal to the lower range of men's passions. It is her heritage from dreadful ancestors who grinned smirkingly from behind a boulder. But no woman, even a highly civilized Queen, can gauge the sex-appeal of a gracious phrase to the lofty range of a modern man's passionate idealisms.

She meant to be kind. Here was an interesting and sensitive gentleman in distress. She would help him out as best she could. She had no notion of what the dove-notes of her "for your sake," meant to an already enamoured youth.

To reiterate the proposition: the big modern woman, impatient of blandishments courtesan or early Victorian

(radically identical) takes no stock of her damnable power. She has been trained, in the ordinary give and take of the world, to sex equality.

Simkin, dry old maid, could have told more of the dove notes in Paula's voice than the unconscious possessor ever dreamed of. Did not Simkin remember a frontier Custom House, and a pile of luggage and a horrid tooth-brush moustached, wizened Customs official, who said: "Open me all that," and her mistress replying (in the dove notes aforesaid): *"Mais, Monsieur, nous sommes si fatiguées,"* and the scrubby melting fool—(Lord! how Simkin despised him!)—muttering *"Eh bien—eh"*—anything, and hastily chalking the trunks and grinning a sentimental *"bon soir, Madame?"* Paula imperially unconscious of sex, had remarked: "What a nice kind little man." And Simkin, with figurative finger applied to a figurative nose: "Yes, Madam. You've only got to take these foreigners the right way." But her inner-combustion laughter engine nearly burst itself. Could she, Simkin, in view of the fact which she afterwards learned, that, owing to notorious smuggling and official slackness, inspectors had recently been putting the fear of God, the Republic, and Starvation into the souls of the poor little examiners of Customs, have bemused the scrubby harassed man into dereliction of duty? Not she. And she did not want to either. She was independent of the whole lot of them, she was. But madam—thinking them just kind . . . ! The blessed innocent.

"For your sake," said Paula, in the blessed innocence of her heart.

There was no struggle in the young man's breast: only a flutter of wonder like the beating of moth's wings as soft as the rhythmic throb of the torrent and the stars in the August night.

His early training in the ways of the social world helped him to cordial acknowledgment.

"But," he added, "there the position remains. If I give him the message, he'll get out of bed and storm about and Heaven knows what will happen to his ribs."

Said Paula: "My dear boy, if you knew how tired I am of ribs! I feel I shall be haunted by them all my life. As soon as I get home to Chadford—my father likes us to come down to breakfast—there'll be cold ribs of beef grinning at me from the sideboard. Oh dear! Why is life so ludicrously complicated?"

"Couldn't you come up to him just for a minute?" urged Gregory.

"Even you are against me," she declared mock tragically. "Well, I suppose I must."

Apparently only she could pacify the lion or rhinoceros or whatever he was. She led the young man back to the cigar-enjoying Babington, who rose politely from his chair.

"Do you mind waiting a few minutes longer? It seems I must humour him."

She read on his face the cold disapproval which his code forbade him to express in words before a third person. But he conveyed it in an icicle of gesture, cigar in one set of fingers, monocle in the other.

"Of course. As you please," said he.

Two nervous, strong hands shot out in greeting as she entered the invalid's chamber. Glad eyes gleamed welcome.

"Why, why, why, why?" he cried. "Why this desertion? Nurse, Gregory—" he dismissed them summarily. "Why this fantastic story of coal-mines?"

"Fantastic?"

"Yes, why fantastic pride? Why not the truth? The

frank, loyal truth? Who in the world can help you as much as I can and will?"

"When I said a coal-mine, I meant a coal-mine," said Paula.

"Rather you meant me to believe in one. I did last night. To-day I don't."

"Why?"

"Information."

Paula stood over the bed of the bandaged man. Anger again shook her. She clenched her hands by her sides.

"Clara Demeter dared tell you——"

"No, my dearest Paula——"

"I'm not your dearest Paula—you presume—you presume upon everything—" She turned away maddeningly conscious of the abominably protective hedge of ribs.

"I do," said he. "You are Paula. You are my dearest. Therefore you're my dearest Paula. But please listen. Clara Demeter, although I have seen much of her to-day, kindest of women that she is, is a lady, a gentlewoman, a feminine thing of sensitive honour. I know everything that is to be known about ladies. I've made an exhaustive study of them. Do sit down, my dear, I want to talk. I want to tell you things about myself. How I acquired an exquisite knowledge of ladies. I was thirteen. I lived with my parents in rooms in Greek Street, Soho, over a shop. Two rooms and a kitchen. I slept in the kitchen. I had dreamed of ladies. I had built them up out of my own inner consciousness. For my boyish self I had invented ladies. Then I met a lady, and I found, as I have always done, that my invention was right and sound in every particular——"

Paula put up silencing hands and brought to bear on the sick man all the weapons of her charm.

"My dear friend—do forgive me. Another time I'll love to hear. Meanwhile, if you've nothing else to say to me, I must go back to my host——"

"To that dried stockfish of a fellow! He doesn't count. He doesn't exist. There's no earthly reason."

Paula smiled, "I must."

"Why?"

"Because like Lady Demeter, and your early friend, I happen to be a lady." She saw him glowering at her, at a loss for a retort. "One has to observe these little courtesies of life. To come back to the point. If it wasn't Lady Demeter who told you about my father's affairs, who was it?"

"I have lawyers and agents; there are also telegraphs and telephones. This came an hour ago."

He handed her a telegram.

"Nothing known coal-field Chadford Park; on contrary rumour mortgagees about to foreclose."

"That true?"

"Yes."

"Well, what I wanted to tell you at once was, that I'll take over the mortgages."

She drew herself up in a sudden flame.

"You'll do no such thing! I forbid you."

"You may," he replied, "but I'm in the habit of doing forbidden things. You might forbid me to buy great blocks of shares in Paulinium Ltd., but I do it all the same. And mortgages are things to be bought and sold just like shares or mutton chops. The mortgagees will be only too glad to get their money back. I suppose there are half a dozen of them. These are not the days of melodrama when the sole mortgagee is the *nouveau riche*

who has schemed to turn the poor old squire and his daughter out of their ancestral home into the snow——"

"Yet you're proposing to be the sole mortgagee," said Paula, "and bring the good old days of melodrama back again. The great Sir Victor Pandolfo will hold the poor old Squire and family at his mercy."

"Pride," said he with a smile. "It is one of your adorable qualities. I have it too in my modest way. If I hadn't found it in you, I should not have loved you. What use should I be to a woman who wasn't proud? What would be the good of giving all that is I to a meek receptive creature? It would be like pouring, as a noble but misguided lady did some years ago, a priceless wine cellar into the kennel. You, alone of women, are worth the wine of my existence." He spoke vehemently, with inherited flashing of hands. "If it wasn't a great wine, I should not have the audacity to make it yours. . . . This mortgage—it's the idea and decision of but an hour. But all the big things of my life have been done on sudden inspiration. The mortgage will be yours—part of marriage settlements——"

"But, good God!" cried Paula driven to bay, and bending defiantly over the bed, "won't you ever understand? I've never said I'll marry you. I've never given you the slightest hope that I'll marry you. I've not the remotest intention of marrying you."

"You mayn't know it," said he, "but you have. Deep down in you. You can't get away from it. It was pre-ordained when you were born, a fairy princess in your castle, while I a squalid, half Italian urchin, was playing about with other squalid urchins in the squalid streets of London. It was pre-ordained when I was born. It's useless to fight against Destiny, which in our case is peculiarly sagacious. And listen!" All of a sudden his

voice rang and an arm shot out and his eyes gleamed. "There are things one doesn't say idly to a woman like you. One leaves them to be divined. Only when one is goaded does one say them. And I say this now. You've got to reckon with a real man's fierce passion and desire."

She swept her hands over her eyes somewhat helplessly. Perhaps, had he been on his feet, in his commanding masculinity, and savage action of enfolding arms had accompanied savage speech, she would have been lost. Woman is only man-proof up to a certain degree, the degree, varying according to individual temperament. So, also, *mutatis mutandis,* is man only woman-proof. You can't moralize on sauce-laws for geese without acknowledging analogous sauce-laws for ganders. But a man lying, perforce, flat on his back, the only part of whose visible person is a torso clad in purple and yellow pyjama jacket, is at a disadvantage in the making of primitive love. In the woman, elemental, sub-conscious sex felt the relief of physical freedom. Yet, no woman can hear a man—unless he is such as to inspire her with horror—declare his passionate desire of her, without some kind of responsive even though hated tremors. So Paula swept her hands over her eyes.

She had recourse to reiteration. "Don't you understand? Don't you understand?"

"I understand so well, that I'm luminously certain!" he cried. "You're mine, I'm yours, for now, for time, for eternity."

Her common sense, her modern womanhood suddenly revolted against the maniac on the bed. She forgot the delicately endangered ribs.

"It's no use your talking like this. We must finish the whole business once and for all. I can't marry you, for the very good reason that I'm going to marry somebody

else. This afternoon I promised to marry Spencer Babington. There! I didn't want to break it to you brutally; but you've made me do it."

She stood over him defiant. Suddenly she caught her breath, expecting prophesied catastrophe of rib disruption. Her heart beat foolishly. But nothing happened save that he held her with his eyes for interminable minutes and then, to her amazement and indignation, broke first into a smile and then into a low chuckle of laughter, which she could not but hold as derisive.

"If you told me you were going to marry a man, I might believe you—but *that!*"

In a fury she left him, marched mechanically down the staircase without thought of lift, and, before she realized where she was, found herself on the hotel verandah quivering with sense of insult.

Babington reared his lean height from the dimness where his chair was situated.

"You've been away a long time, my dear," said he, with a bow of courteous complaint.

"The man's impossible," she declared.

"Quite," said he. "I've been sitting here so long that I feel shivery."

She lost control.

"You'd better go to bed and get warm. Clara has some bed-socks for you. I'll arrange with Simkin. It's a pity you should catch cold."

"My dear Paula," said he, "what on earth is the matter?"

"Everything you can't possibly think of is the matter. I come down telling you of another man's outrageous treatment of me and you say 'Quite,' and complain of feeling cold. Oh! I have no use for you. Good night."

She fled, leaving the most moidered gentleman on this

planet. He passed fingers over perplexed brows. She was engaged to marry him. She had, at last, graciously surrendered herself into his keeping. She was therefore his. She had left him for an unconscionable time with nothing but a half smoked cigar for companion. In order that she should not have to seek him out, he had waited for her in the chilly night air. His doctor had warned him of the rheumatic menace of the night air of the Savoy mountains. He had shown a certain amount of chivalry, if not of heroism. And this was how he was rewarded. He went indoors and sank into an arm-chair furthest removed from the window, and ordering a small bottle of Vichy and a slice of lemon from the red-raimented Arab, lit—like a desperate man, in defiance of principle—another cigar—and pondered like many a man before him, over the *imponderabilia* of woman.

Meanwhile the woman of unweighable or incalculable motives, called for Simkin and bade her pack; she also bade her order a car for eight o'clock in the morning. She would go with a dressing-case to Aix, Lyon, Paris—no matter where, in search of a train. Simkin could follow her at leisure, with the heavy luggage, to Chadford in Gloucestershire.

CHAPTER XI

PAULA sat by the morning-room window of Chadford Park, looking at the pale pearl of the November sky against which the damp yellow trees glimmered mournfully. Yellow leaves strewed the lawn and the damp gravelled paths; one or two stuck dismally on the body of a female statue giving her the appearance of a disarranged or absent-minded Eve. The prospect before Paula was informed with peculiar melancholy, suggestive of Tennysonian moated granges and decaying woods and dreary gleams and the approaching end of all things. Even a robin, on a near syringa, seemed to cock a disgusted eye over the scene of neglect and desolation. He had, obviously, been told about it, and unbelieving had come to see for himself. Instead of half a dozen gardeners to tidy up the place, there only remained one and a half, old Simkin and a boy. Old Simkin was hard put to it to keep the kitchen garden going. To the boy the sweeping up and carrying away in a wheelbarrow of dead leaves was the most loathsomely futile form of human activity.

Paula was alone, writing, with a silk shawl thrown over her shoulders. A wood fire on the opposite side of the great room smouldered sulkily, as though the damp of hopelessness had sunk into its soul. Faded chintz covers on sofas and chairs loomed disconsolate in the half-light. Here and there discoloured patches of wall proclaimed removal of pictures.

An old Great Dane rose shivering from the hearth-rug and loped creakingly up to her, thrust his head under her

arm, as she wrote and appealed to her from his patient topaz eyes. She fondled his head and spoke, as one who knows the moods of dogs, the words that he desired to hear. Whereupon, consoled, he creaked away, and with a sigh, floundered back into a circle in front of the fire.

A few moments afterwards with much the same lope and creak, entered Pargiter, the old butler, once a very fine figure of a man, with letters on a salver. As she took them, she noticed that his coat-cuff was frayed. This most trivial of facts irritated her. Ruin was descending on Chadford Park; but there was no reason for Pargiter to dress the part of faithful and decayed retainer. His wages had not been lowered. Mr. Veresy had not even given him notice. Like all the rest of them, he had, notoriously, put something by. Out of footman's livery from the past five and twenty years, he had found, as became a butler's dignity and income, his own clothes. She decided that the pathos of the frayed sleeve was rather cheap.

"The young person from the Vicarage is here, ma'am."

"I'll see her in a few minutes. I'll ring."

She sighed. The young person in question recommended by the Vicar's wife, had vast ambitions, apparently, to see the world, but not experience in the craft of ministering to the intimate wants of ladies. Her father was a once respectable carpenter, with half a dozen children, who had lately forsaken God-fearing ways for a Bolshevist and alcoholic path.

"I must have a maid-servant of some kind," Paula had said—and this was all the attendant she could get.

Simkin had departed. For how could she afford the Simkin wages? Old Simkin had not been quite the feudal altruist she had made him out to be. There had been an affecting scene. The old man, with tears in his

eyes, had protested—as far as Paula could gather—that, were it not for the price of pork, he would have died rather than allow his daughter to leave Miss Paula's service. But the price of pork (and other things) was that turrible. . . . So Simkin had melted away into an Americo-ducal firmament, whence she wrote letters as politely rueful as those of honest Ovid from his exile among the Goths.

So many things had melted away during the past two months. The flat in Hansel Mansions, let furnished to a queer rich bachelor from Kettering. The vivid country-house life which usually filled her autumn. Not that there had been lack of the customary invitations; but maid-less, autumn-kit-less, hesitating at the prospect of expensive journeys, tips, bridge losses and the incidental costs of fashionable visiting, she had declined on the grounds of her father's health. These vain amenities of life had melted away. So had Clara Demeter. It would take a miniature epic to describe the comfortable lady's fury at Paula's preposterous behaviour. No sooner had she reconciled herself to Paula's turning down of Victor Pandolfo and her acceptance of Spencer Babington, than the irresponsible woman goes off and leaves the three of them there, at Rênes-les-Eaux, in the lurch. There was she, Clara Demeter—"I ask you, my dear, to think of it" —planted between two wild men—and she, an invalid, doing her cure, under doctor's prescription of perfect rest for exhausted nerves. "Until you come to your senses, Paula," wrote the indignant lady, "I don't see how I can have anything more to do with you. We should only quarrel, which besides being undignified, is bad for my health. Already I've been so worried that the cure has done me no good. I have put on weight, instead of losing it. A sure sign."

And with Lady Demeter had melted Spencer Babington, not into Czecho-Slovakia but into the blue inane of the Pacific. Another fellow, it seemed, had been sounded as to Prague, and not having hedged round the matter with such necessary diplomatic cautions and reservations, had been appointed. Spencer, applying for leave, had gone off on a world trip in the height of spiritual dudgeon and physical comfort. He had tried to persuade Demeter to accompany him. But Clara had put her foot down.

"Because you've lost a wife—that's no reason why I should lose a husband."

That settled it.

All this was told to Paula in letters ever renunciatory of friendship. It was right, said Clara, that she should know. She did not defend herself. What was the use? She could take a man's humorous view of her sex and recognize its granitic inconvincibility.

Even Pandolfo seemed to have undergone the same process of vaporisation. She had received news of him from Nurse Williams, leading a life of mild riot in Bodmin, where apparently her new clothes had almost shut respectable doors, to say nothing of those of the church, against her. "No one will believe," said she, in the playful way of the spinster secure of reputation, "that I came by them honestly." As for Sir Victor, his ribs had mended beautifully very soon after Mrs. Field's departure from Rênes-les-Eaux, and he had gone straight back to London with Mr. Uglow and herself, had insisted on her staying a night or two in his beautiful home in Chelsea and had then sent her off with an astonishing cheque and a first-class return ticket to Cornwall. Indirect news had also come to her from Gregory Uglow. In a letter from London, addressed to Hansel Mansions and forwarded thence, he thanked her very courteously for her

kindness to him in Rênes, also gave satisfactory tidings of Sir Victor's ribs, and placed his devoted services ever at her disposal. She replied and sent her kind regards to Sir Victor, who up to now had not acknowledged the message. In fact Pandolfo had taken no further heed of her existence; which in one way was a comfort, but in another an insult. Very reasonably, accordingly to her sex's psychology, she nursed a grievance against Pandolfo.

The only persons who gave no sign of melting were Myrtilla and her father, especially the latter, whose portliness increased in inverse ratio to his fortunes. A man addicted to the exercise habit for many years, he now suffered from its forced abandonment. He had given up his golf-club, sold his stable and shrank from wandering round his neglected estate. Now and again he went up to London, driving to the station in the one surviving rattle-trap of a car, and there transacted mysterious business. But that wasn't exercise. His friend the Vicar, a stalwart and affluent contemporary, found a birthday opportunity of presenting him with a complicated set of poles and cross-beams and rings and india-rubber ropes and a manual as to their use, written in three languages. A quarter of an hour a day at this, said the Vicar, would make him as fit as a whole day's hunting. But Mr. Veresy had arrived at such a stage of moral atrophy as to declare that if he couldn't hunt, it didn't matter to him whether he were fit or not. So he watched his girth grow with a kind of morbid satisfaction. It served the world right for treating him so unjustly.

"When a man's ruined," said he, "the only thing left for him to do is to face it like a gentleman."

Mr. Veresy sat down in his library, and at meals in his dining-room, did nothing and faced ruin like a gentleman.

Myrtilla, an angular and elderly model upon whom it might have been supposed that Paula, in her magnificence had been fashioned, had ruthlessly cut down household expenses, discharged a regiment of men and sold horses and pictures in order to provide for daily necessities of living. She had put the fear of the Putney flat into her father's soul. Rather than the Putney flat, he would inhabit the meanest room at Chadford and live on tripe and onions cooked there in a saucepan. He didn't mind hardship; but he couldn't stand Putney.

"He's quite impossible, my dear," said Myrtilla. "If I hadn't insisted on the money for the pictures and the horses being paid into my private banking account, I don't know what would have happened to us. And what will happen I know less. We can't live on pictures and horses for the rest of our lives."

"But what about the mortgagees foreclosing?" asked Paula. "If they do, we'll be turned out neck and crop."

Well, the mortgagees, as far as Myrtilla could judge, had been temporarily appeased. How, she did not know. She had gone herself into Gloucester to see Bulstrode. Bulstrode and Co. had been the family solicitors from time immemorial. Old Bulstrode, the delightfullest old thing in the world had died, as Paula knew, a couple of years ago, and young Bulstrode, a perky young man who magnified his office, reigned in his stead. Not a word could Myrtilla get out of him.

"My dear lady," he had begun. Myrtilla hated the jackanaping of a form of address only tolerable in far different social conditions. "My dear lady," said he, "I am Mr. Veresy's confidential adviser. It is evident, therefore, that I cannot discuss matters that are confidential as between solicitor and client with you, unless

you bring me Mr. Veresy's assurance that you are entirely in his confidence."

Myrtilla, narrating the interview, said: "And he swung back in his swivel-chair and put his pudgy fingertips together, and looked at me out of his fishy little eyes—and I could have killed him."

And the devil of it all was, according to Myrtilla, that Mr. Veresy would give no such assurance. He had the obstinate secretiveness of the weak man. Even though he faced, like a gentleman, as he declared, the ruin brought about by his own folly, and gave up to Myrtilla the whole responsibility of dealing with such ruin, as far as it affected the household, he denied the feminine mind's capacity of dealing with its higher financial aspects. His dear Myrtilla's criticisms could not be helpful in that they would be based on misapprehension of facts and on erroneous judgment.

"So here we are, living from hand to mouth, and that's all I know about it."

Thus Myrtilla, mistress of Chadford Park. How could Paula, younger daughter and, by theoretic convention of marriage, cut off from practical concern with her father's affairs, interfere with any hope of success?

In the queer, detached old English way they loved each other dearly. Once she had come to Chadford to discuss the situation and offer her filial sympathy, he would not let her go. Indeed, by means of furtive little caresses, when no one was looking, and a shy word of endearment, he gave her to understand that she was the favourite daughter. Never a hint did he give of disloyalty or ingratitude towards Myrtilla. He was too great a gentleman openly to differentiate between them. But unregenerate man resents in his heart excess of female virtue especially when it is redeemed by some-

what of a domineering spirit. He loved Myrtilla with the affection due to the offspring of his dear and respected wife and to the capable manager of his establishment; but Paula he adored with scrupulously veiled adoration.

Knowledge of the fact was a matter of elementary intuition. It distressed her inconceivably. What had she done for her father save leave him at the first opportunity, while Myrtilla had sacrificed youth and womanhood and all that mattered to woman to his comfort? The injustice of it! Yet, now and again, when the three of them were seated at the table in the intimacy of their fallen fortunes, she felt nearer to him by reason of her wider sympathies and experience of the world than the precise Myrtilla, with her almost algebraic conception of life. He was a handsome man, in his florid way; with the thick, curly, neatly cut hair, parted in the middle, just as he wore it as a young dragoon, although now snow-white, and a white moustache curling up at the ends with just the faintest swaggering suggestion. In him she recognized her own beautifully cut features and the twist of an ironical mouth. And they would exchange little jests together at which Myrtilla sniffed resignedly.

Yet, in spite of this undercurrent of mutual understanding, she found herself as much shut off as Myrtilla from his business confidence. He deplored his inability to continue her allowance. Sometimes he could kick himself from here to the Infernal Regions as the meanest skunk alive. But his dear old girl must see how he was tied hand and foot. The restraint of his feet, Paula declared, was a blessing in disguise, in so much as it precluded the carrying out of his rash inclination. He patted her shoulder. She was a brick to take it that way. Well, that was the situation. The scoundrel, Monte Dangerfield, was at the bottom of it all. Why the fellow

had not long before this been pitched out of the City into one of His Majesty's gaols he had no conception. On generalities of the past he was eloquent; on particulars of the present he was as dumb as an oyster.

"There are signs, my dear, that things may not be so bad as one dreaded. At any rate the roof of Chadford is still over our heads. If it tumbles in on top of us, we three'll have the satisfaction of being buried together. . . . I know it's devilish dull for you; but if you can make do with hash and rice pudding, I'll be grateful."

As to the nature of the signs, he gave no idea. Paula could not question him, any more than he could question her on her private affairs. When she came to think of it, her own reticence very fairly balanced his. Not a whisper did she breathe at Chadford Park of the pursuit of Pandolfo or her transient engagement to Spencer Babington. The very names never stirred the stagnant air.

Such was the situation on that November afternoon.

Paula, sitting under the cold radiation of the great window, drew her silk wrap closer around her shoulders and shivered. She leaned back in her chair and took stock of life. There was enough desolation in front of her and about her to make a silly woman sit up and howl like a dog. But she prided herself on not being a silly woman. . . . An old aunt of her childhood, still living in the odour of lavender, used to say, "My dear, when things look very black for us, there is nothing so wise as to count up our mercies." Paula smiled at the remembrance of the sweet and prim philosophy; but she counted all the same. And she came to the conclusion that she was not the least bit in the world unhappy. At the worst turn of Fortune's wheel, she was assured of bed, food and raiment adequate to inclemency of climate. She was

living, for the present, at any rate, in her childhood's home, sleeping in her own room consecrated by how many girlish hopes and fears. Myrtilla loved her in a dry sisterly fashion. Perhaps more than Myrtilla allowed herself to reveal. Now and then, during the past two or three months, she had been vaguely suspicious of possible smouldering fires behind her elder sister's calm and calculating eyes. Hitherto, in the triumph of her beauty and her wide existence, she had given little more than comfortable thought to Myrtilla. Now, she reflected that their life-long relations had never been shadowed by a cloud of jealousy or misunderstanding. Myrtilla had always stood there, coldly affectionate, undemonstrative, ever capable, ever helpful, ever almost scientifically gentle. . . . Was it not more than possible that great love stirred the passionate depths that the woman kept sternly hidden from mankind? Of course, there had been the inevitable man. Paula was at school abroad at the time and had pieced together imperfect scraps of information. But the composite result was enough to tell her that there had been an engagement; that the young gentleman, the other party to the contract, had been swooped down upon by another young gentleman's wife and carried off to Ceylon. Hence rupture of engagement, divorce, a damnably exasperatingly happy marriage of the abominable pair and the landing high and dry of Myrtilla. His name, Paula remembered, was Buddicombe; he came of an old Devonshire family, and now he was a Member of Parliament, an old Tory, upholder of Church and State and a shining light in the House of Laymen. But of all this the reserved Myrtilla had never spoken a word. Yet, inside her, Paula felt assured, smouldered the hidden fires aforesaid. They were a queer, reticent lot, the Veresys.

And there was her father whose affection, though unexpressed, was obvious.

Yes, there were a host of mercies to be counted up. Splendid health was one of them. The peace, perfect peace of the hymn was an orgy compared with the restfulness of Chadford. Like other factors in life possibly to be regretted, worries had melted away. She went to bed not caring what the dull morrow might bring forth. She awoke not apprehensive of some brutal sign of a man's would-be domination. She was free of Pandolfo; free of Spencer Babington. She felt inclined to agree with her late maid, Simkin, that men spelled nothing but trouble.

Here perhaps you see pursued nymph or primitive woman panting in the security of forest recess, at last regained, her hands on her heart.

No analogy of the kind suggested itself to the sophisticated mind of Paula Field. She had escaped from pursuers and that was enough for her. As for hands on panting heart—her heart beat with perfect normality.

She welcomed the peace and quiet and the mastery of her time. She could get on with her work which, however one may despise the sordid, meant money. Her articles in the women's journals had always been the essays of a woman of the world and not the jottings of a fashionable reporter. She carried on with the county side of social affairs. And also, greatly daring, she began another novel.

She had been writing for an hour or two, not overjoyously inspired by outer things, yet accepting them with a melancholy content, when Pargiter had entered with news of the young person from the Vicarage and the letters on the salver. These, after a spell of reverie, she took up idly, as a recluse for whom the great world has

ceased to be of vivid interest. It seemed to be the usual budget of scrawls from friends telling of gay doings and reproaching or pitying her for non-participation, two or three tradesmen's envelopes containing bills or receipts and a few circulars. Yet when she gave them her closer attention, she noticed one envelope addressed in a not unfamiliar nervous handwriting. She opened it and read:

"Dear Mrs. Field,

"I am requested by Sir Victor to make his profound apologies for the non-delivery of your promised 'Paulinium' car. He begs you to believe that it has not been through lack of consideration on his part, delay, in the first place, being due to his anxiety that nothing short of perfection should be offered to you. And now I am to say, with his sincerest regret, that another six months, at least, must elapse before the car, as he desires it to be, can be delivered. Unfortunately, when the severe tests came to be made, a few flaws here and there appeared in the metal which would make the car unsafe. He begs me to remind you that, after all, the metal a few months ago was only in the experimental stage. He has discovered to what causes these flaws were due and has taken steps to remedy them in new forgings. But, in his immense disappointment, he has had to scrap your chassis, and so he asks me to crave your gracious indulgence for a few necessary months.

"Yours sincerely,
"Gregory Uglow."

The envelope contained also a shy scrap of paper.

"Dear Mrs. Field,

"The enclosed is written as you may gather, according to instructions. I had to submit it for his approval. But really he is almost heart-broken over his failure. Forgive me if I am outrageously impertinent when I say that I know a kind little word from you would cheer him enormously.

"G. U."

At dinner that evening, a none too sumptuous meal, though served with ancient solemnity by Pargiter of the frayed coat-cuffs, Mr. Veresy turned to his younger daughter.

"My dear Paula, do you know a man called Pandolfo?"

She started. She had been thinking of nothing but the obsessing man for the past five hours.

"Sir Victor Pandolfo? Yes, I know him."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

Said Paula with a smile: "I suppose I know about a thousand people, more or less. Why should I pick him out for special mention?"

"He seems to be a damn good fellow," said Mr. Veresy, curling his white moustache. "There are only the three of us, and I think you ought to know how things are. Well—it comes to this, I've met Pandolfo in London—quite recently. Business, you know. As a matter of fact, he has bought up all the mortgages and is now sole mortgagee and is letting me down very easily and generously. I told you some time ago that things might be on the turn. It was only this morning that I heard he was a friend of yours." In answer to Paula's look of enquiry he went on confidentially. "It was young Bulstrode, if you wish to know. I don't like the chap—not a patch on his father—but still he's a shrewd man of business. Oh yes, my dear. Don't make any mistake. There are few brick walls which that—I grant you—rather objectionable young man can't see through. He has been working on his own to find out things about Pandolfo. And it turns out that he's a great friend of yours. Charming fellow. Small world, isn't it?"

The florid gentleman of the thick white hair parted accurately down the middle smiled at his daughters with bland innocence.

"You say you met Sir Victor on business?" said Paula. "Didn't he mention the fact that he knew me? He was quite aware that I belonged here."

"No. That's the funny part about it," said Mr.

Veresy. "And yet, I don't know. A gentleman doesn't mix up business affairs with social relations. . . . A delightful chap."

"It's a curious coincidence that he should have bought up the mortgages, isn't it?" said Paula.

"The more one lives, my dear, the less is one struck by coincidences. I can tell you a dozen off-hand—I remember in '84 or '85—no—it was 1886——"

He wandered off into an inapposite tale to which Paula listened with dutiful eyes, but with bewildered and deaf ears.

CHAPTER XII

Gregory Uglow, writing according to instructions, had given but a poor account of the disaster that had befallen the Paulinium car. It had nearly been the death of the three of them, Pandolfo, Uglow, and the chauffeur. The chassis and engine responded to all kinds of tests. It ran up the famous hill in Hampstead on top gear as though it were coasting down a slope. It did an incredible number of miles an hour at Brooklands. The miniature boudoir of a limousine body invented by Pandolfo was fitted. They went a-testing springs and balance along the Portsmouth road. Then, suddenly, somewhere near Cobham, something happened. The car danced round and round as though it were drunk and turned a somersault into a ditch. The chauffeur, miraculously thrown clear, opened the topmost door and hauled out Pandolfo and Uglow, considerably bruised.

"What the devil——?" cried Pandolfo.

"The cardan-shaft, sir," said the chauffeur. "There must have been a flaw in the metal."

"A flaw?" Pandolfo stared at him as though he had spoken blasphemy.

"It's the one and only way of accounting for it," said the chauffeur.

A very sober, dangerous looking Pandolfo returned with Uglow in a hired car to London. All he said on the homeward way was:

"I wonder what I've done to God that he should be against me."

For the next few days he went about the picture of ferocious gloom, like a modern Lucifer doing battle with the Almighty Powers. For, when the poor wreck was towed into the Bermondsey works and the shattered body removed, the cause of the accident was only too horribly clear. The cardan-shaft had snapped like a bit of brittle wood. The sections of the fracture showed the flaw. Nor was that all. The shock of the fall, magnified by the weight of the body, had played the almost incomprehensible devil with the rest of the metal work. The back axle had snapped too. There was one crack in the petrol tank and another in the cylinder casings. It became obvious to the inventor and his scared lieutenant that, at its present stage of development, Paulinium could not supersede steel in the making of motor-car engines.

"Scrap the lot," said Pandolfo to his manager in the dismal shed. "I see what's wrong."

Whether he did or not, no man can say; perhaps least of all Pandolfo himself.

From the moment of his arrival in England, he had started furiously to work. The Paulinium Steel Company—his fellow directors had prevailed on him to accept this new designation of the metal, so as to inspire public confidence, had been floated. A Staffordshire site, near the coal-mines, had been bought for the erection of vast works, which now had already been begun. He had triumphed over opposition, he had crashed through all obstacles. He had worked, as Gregory Uglow, perhaps more loyal than original in phrase, said, Napoleonically. And side by side with the huge conception of the Paulinium Works, with its infinite detail of plans, of plant, of ready sources of ores and their easy transport, of choosing and salarying and housing metallurgical chemists, of

inventing, parenthetically, a cooking stove heated by waste that would cook a thousand meals at once, ran the fierce desire to give Paula Field the earth's perfection of automobiles.

At the announcement of her engagement to Spencer Babington he had laughed in sublime certainty of knowledge. At her summary casting off of his dry rival he had smiled with satisfaction. He had consented to sit at the feet of Lady Demeter.

"My dear man," she said, "give the woman a chance. Make her look on you as a necessity instead of a nuisance."

"A nuisance?"

"Yes. If you'll forgive my saying so, a damned nuisance. You've gone the wrong way to work."

"I've been accustomed to get what I want," said Pandolfo.

"But a woman isn't a 'what,' she's a 'who,' which makes all the difference," said Lady Demeter.

She did not lack courage. He admired her; confessed to her shedding upon him a new light; insinuated delicately that she counselled strategy rather than massed attack in front-formation.

"I've nearly exhausted myself in telling you," replied Lady Demeter.

That was why Pandolfo took up his strategic position on distant heights, and gave to his enemy no sign of his existence. He obtained, however, Nurse Williams's confirmation of Lady Demeter's advice, when she passed through London on her way back from her Bodmin holiday. She had a half scared meal with him in the museum that was his dining-room, Gregory Uglow having been sent off to lunch at his club, suffered all sorts of frank opinions to be torn out of her, like some mediæval Jew

yielding teeth to the torturer of a prominent baron, before she disclosed all she divined, felt or knew of the feminine psychology of Paula Field.

"A woman doesn't only want to be wanted, but she wants to want. That sounds rather muddled, but you see what I mean?"

"I do," said he.

"And I shouldn't let her have any idea of the mortgages, if I were you," she added.

"Inadvisable, eh?"

"Fatal."

"I'll see what can be done," said he.

So he made secrecy a condition in his negotiations for the purchase of the mortgages, and on his meeting with Mr. Veresy gave no hint of his acquaintance with any member of the family.

It was the time of his life at which he rode the highest, in the full blaze of Fortune. The companies which ran his various inventions flourished exceedingly. He held himself to be a man of solid wealth. Beyond the acquisition of a picture now and then, he had few expensive tastes. The pictures themselves were investments. He lived modestly. Work absorbed the vital energy that might have found an outlet in the costlier vices. When his solicitor questioned the sagacity of his proposal to buy up the Chadford Park mortgages, in view of the large sums he was pouring into the Paulinium Steel Company, he replied airily:

"My dear fellow, I've got money to burn."

Again the solicitor protested. If Mr. Veresy could not pay the interest to the then mortgagees, how did he himself expect to be paid?

"Did you ever hear of a Guardian Angel?"

"Not outside of Heaven or a lunatic asylum."

"Well, you see one now," said Pandolfo. "What does the trumpery interest matter to me?"

He soared away on newly invented wings. The image delighted him. Hitherto he had not crystallized his idea so perfectly. He would be her Guardian Angel working for her from the impenetrability of the Vast Inane, shielding her from harm, answering from the void her unspoken prayers. He rejoiced in the colossal self-conception. Instead of being the damned nuisance of Lady Demeter's trenchant homily, he would become a transcendental and mystical protective power of which she should be unconscious.

After a while, he chafed at the lack of practical means of performing these angelic ministrations. The only thing that money could do he had done. Besides, the artist idealist in him despised money. Purchase, for him who had the means, was so easy. On the table of his studio-laboratory, the great octagonal room into which Gregory Uglow had been led from the Chelsea Embankment, lay, week by week, the pertly covered, incongruous journal of frivolity to which she contributed her weekly article. This he read devoutly. It was ever like herself, clear-headed, kind, witty in the grand manner.

"How much do you think they pay her for it?" he asked one day.

Gregory Uglow suggested fairly accurately the rate. Pandolfo swore it was monstrous exploitation of genius. Sweated labour.

"I've a good mind to buy up the rotten magazine and pay decent prices to contributors," he declared.

But there again, it was only the power of money—even if he could have afforded to commit the idiotic act. His brain, at last, had gripped the truth that her chance realization, in the future, of pecuniary indebtedness towards

him would alienate her from him for ever. It was money, money all the time; exasperatingly money. He held it only just that she should possess shares in the company to which she had given her name. But how to give them to her and the consequent enjoyment, therefrom, without her knowledge?

"How the devil can I do it?"

Gregory Uglow, very uncomfortably and despairingly up to the lips of his confidence, said:

"The only way I can see, is to make her a beneficiary under your will."

"I've done it," cried Pandolfo. "Do you think I'm devoid of imagination? Of course I've made my will. She and you are the only people in the world I care for. You're provided for. She gets the rest."

This particular conversation took place in the miserable threadbare sitting-room of the miserable Staffordshire hotel nearest to the site of the Paulinium Steel Works, where they were spending the night. Outside it was all wind and mud and coal smoke and depression. Save for the mud, it was more or less the same inside. He loved to descend unexpectedly and tear about the place with Uglow following him like a recording shadow. The hotel's greasy food and coarse discomfort affected him very little. Ordinarily he was too exuberant with new schemes for alterations and improvements, but to-day's visit had shown just a dull level of progress, with not a jagged bit for his eager mind to seize upon. So he sat with Gregory over a sullen fire in a high old-fashioned grate and talked of what, to him, was the ever personal aspect of Paulinium.

"That's very kind of you, Sir Victor," said the young man, after a pause. "I needn't say that such a thing never entered my head. But I wish you'd cut me out."

"Eh?" cried Pandolfo. "Why?"

"I should feel more independent," replied Uglow awkwardly.

Pandolfo took up the poker and lunged at the fire.

"My God! Here's another of 'em! Can't a man do anything for a fellow human creature without trampling on his susceptibilities? Independent! What the deuce do you want to be any more independent than you are already? You're free. I haven't bought you. You can go out now, any day, and earn double the money I give you."

Gregory interrupted him quickly: "I couldn't earn all the other things you give me."

"Then why are you drivelling about independence? You give me to infer that there's some sort of a bond—friendship, sympathy, understanding, loyalty, whatever you like to call it, between us, which means more to you than money. Well, damn it all, I take that for granted. Do you think I'd discuss my personal feelings with any other man on God's earth? . . ." He rose, poker in hand and strode about the gas-lit room. "That's what we've been talking about. The something that isn't money. It has been in my power, somehow or other, to give it to you. And you're dissatisfied. You want to be independent. You're absurd. Don't let me hear anything more about it."

He threw the poker into the fender and sat down again.

"It was your will—the question of money——" Gregory hazarded. "There, you see, it crops up again."

"What on earth will it matter when I'm dead?"

"Nothing. But it will matter all the time that you're alive."

"Thank God!" cried Pandolfo, "my mother wasn't a lineal descendant of prehistoric Scottish kings."

Gregory laughed. "It isn't that."

"Then what is it?"

Gregory sighed. "I'm afraid I can't explain."

"Are you afraid that your loyalty can't stick it out for the ten, fifteen, thirty, forty years of the life that may be before me?"

Gregory grew pale. How could he explain the inexplicable? There was a moment of tense silence during which he felt as though the two men's souls were at death grapple. The sullen layer of coal raised a while ago by Pandolfo's poker, fell with a crash. Both started.

"No man can be loyal unless he is free," said Gregory.

Pandolfo broke away with a laugh and a wide gesture.

"Well, consider yourself disinherited."

"It will be a relief to me, Sir Victor," said Gregory.

The shirt-sleeved landlord brought in the whisky and syphon that had been previously ordered, and lingered in talk while he poured out the modest drinks. When he had gone Pandolfo said:

"You and Mrs. Field are very much alike in many ways. I wonder whether you understand her better than I do."

"I've never attempted to think of understanding her," replied Gregory. "I scarcely know her."

"That's true," said Pandolfo. He sipped his whisky and soda. Then suddenly: "Good God, what are these?"

Two pairs of ancient and deformed carpet slippers, worn by generations of commercial travellers had been unostentatiously set by the landlord to warm by the fire. The kicking of the dreadful things to the other side of the room broke the thread of talk. Pandolfo took up the detective novel which he had bought at the station bookstall and Gregory sat down at the round centre table and

transcribed on fair paper the day's rough pencilled notes from a little black book. Later they parted for the night without reference to their conversation.

When the Perfect Car stood ready for the road before the last disastrous test, Pandolfo, still impressed by Lady Demeter's wisdom, devised a method of delivery. He would sacrifice his impetuous desire to dash down to Gloucestershire himself, and would send Gregory Uglow in his stead. That way lay the delicacy counselled by women. Yet when he announced his intention, the young man's response lacked enthusiasm.

"Short of going myself, which for my own reasons isn't feasible, I don't see that I could pay her a greater compliment than making you my representative. Or you either."

"Of course, if you tell me to do it——" said Gregory.

"I do tell you—and there's an end of it."

Pandolfo, dictatorial, closed discussion.

Gregory went away, heavy-hearted. Suppose in anti-Pandolfo mood, she scorned the gift? What would be his own position? That he himself would receive gracious welcome he did not doubt. But he would have to plead for acceptance and, in doing so, plead the amorous cause of his benefactor. He could see the ironic smile at the corners of her perfect lips. He could see the soft humorous eyes reading his own miserable secret. Thank Heaven, said he, he had spoken bravely about the legacy. That would have strangled his inmost and most wildly delicious thoughts. A free man he could think of her, at any rate. A man of sense and character, he could, if left alone, check lunacy in its effect on conduct. Pandolfo was the great man and Paula was the great woman. As coldly clear as an iceberg in wind-swept weather was the fact that the two were made for each other. He was

under no illusion. He resigned himself absolutely to their eventual and inevitable mating. But to be employed as an agent in the process was intolerable. Besides, the proposition contained an element of mediæval grotesquerie repellent to the modern spirit. So he dreaded the presentation of the car.

And even if she did not scorn the thing, but merely fell into helpless collapse before it, asking him what in the world she was going to do with it? What could he say? His was the fantastic mission to deliver to a member of an impoverished aristocratic family a vast automobile all bright blue and silver and satin and what-not, such as an Indian Rajah, with tastes unmodified by European experience, might have commanded for State purposes, to match his ceremonial elephants. It was glaringly out of scale with her means, her position, her dignified modesty. Even if she could afford to pay the wages of the highly skilled man required to drive and attend to it, she would no more dream of flaunting in it about the quiet country roads than of wearing a diamond tiara on her visits to the poor.

A little homely run-about, to show the wonder of Paulinium, yes; but before this thing of Oriental gorgeousness his heart sank. And he knew, that whatever she might do or say, her heart would sink with his, for precisely the same reason. This side idolatry he loved Pandolfo. Her prospective, inevitable and instantaneous judgment of his hero was intolerable. She would not laugh in derision—another woman might; but she was too exquisitely bred. Yet, suppose she did—he would be capable of springing at her and strangling her, for all his love.

And not a word of this did he dare breathe to Pandolfo. The car had been his dream, his solace and his joy for months. Of course, the engine had been planned and the

chassis begun long before his meeting with Paula at Hinsted in the summer. It was then but a trial of the new metal. But when once the magic name had been discovered, the car had ceased to be a cold experiment and had become a fervid consecration. What protest could the sensitive youth make to the enraptured giant?

Perhaps no man ever hated inanimate thing more than did Gregory Uglow hate the throbbing monster with its long flashing bonnet and its cobalt blue limousine body, the whole car a structure of exquisite and sensuous lines, when he waited in front of it on the pavement on that last test morning, for Pandolfo to come out of the Chelsea house. He was oppressed by the sense of the wrongness of its insolent luxury.

Pandolfo ran down the steps, walked right round the car.

"God! It's good, isn't it? Achievement—no. Creation—there's nothing like it in the world. You feel a thrill when you find you've begotten a child. Any damned fool can do that. But for a child of the brain, multiply the thrill a million times. This marvel of a thing is ME."

He laughed, dashed in his swift way into the car; Gregory followed; the chauffeur who had waited by the door rug over arm, spread the rug.

Once outside the tram lines of London, they careered like gods. And then, all of a sudden, came the crazy catastrophe.

The feelings of few young men have been more complicated than those of Gregory Uglow, when he surveyed the complete wreckage of the great Paulinium car.

CHAPTER XIII

PAULA wrote at once to Pandolfo. Could kind-hearted woman do less? Indeed a betraying moisture of the eyes blurred now and then the written words. Never had she felt so tenderly disposed towards him as now in his disappointment and humiliation. She gave him her spontaneous sympathy, consoled him with assurances of the perfecting of her metal and chid him gently for his neglect. She made it clear that, with her modified means, she could no more dream of the upkeep of a large car than of that of a racing stable. If he wished to please her, he must concentrate all his energies on things greater than such vanities. The fact of his giving her name to the metal was sufficient to secure for ever her intense interest in its development.

Of Bulstrode's revelation she said nothing. Evidently Pandolfo desired her not to know of the mortgage. The secret had been well kept. Of course, during their last interview at Rênes-les-Eaux, Pandolfo had declared his intention of becoming the sole mortgagee; but that declaration had obviously been dependent on his beautiful matrimonial scheme. That having gone agley altogether, like the schemes of mice and men referred to by the poet, she had never given the question of the mortgages, as far as he was concerned, a single thought. Now, she gave it many, and many a worrying one; especially when she had sealed and posted her sympathetic letter.

She sought out her father.

"I want to know why Sir Victor Pandolfo has never

referred to his acquaintance—indeed friendship with me."

"I told you," said Mr. Veresy.

"You didn't tell me enough. He must have made some conditions of secrecy."

Paula, standing over the kindly white-haired gentleman forced him to confession.

"In a way he did. He said that such transactions being entirely out of his way of business, his name should not be mentioned outside the little circle of people directly interested. That's why I respected his confidence as regards Myrtilla and yourself. It was only when young Bulstrode told me you were friends that I gave you the information."

She nodded and thanked him with a smile and a filial pat on the shoulder and went away. On the tip of her tongue was the question:

"You silly old dear, hasn't it occurred to you that, just because we were such friends, he was anxious for me not to know?"

But it went no further. Evidently the idea had not occurred to Mr. Veresy; and his daughter was not one to disturb a quiet mind with disconcerting suggestions.

Her own mind, however, suffered disturbance. For some months she had been freed from the man's obsession. Now, more than ever, did it oppress her.

Mortgagees don't threaten to foreclose if interest is paid regularly. If they want to realize their capital, they have only to sell their mortgages like any other sound securities. Of this, in spite of her ordinary careless woman's ignorance of business affairs, her common sense made her aware. Some time before her father had airily announced an easing of difficulties. What else could that mean than one of Pandolfo's bravura gestures?

"My dear sir," she could hear him saying, "don't have a moment's anxiety. It is true that I have bought up the mortgages on Chadford which represent a capital of so many thousand pounds, and that the ordinary business man, the stranger, who has nothing to do with sentiment, expects his quarterly instalment of interest to be paid into his bank, through his solicitor. Pray regard me in another light altogether. I know the straits to which our old landed families have been put since the war, and, it is far from my heart to make them straiter. It will be the great pleasure and honour of my life to allow the question of interest to be one of your power, convenience and honour."

Her intuition pictured fairly accurately the state of affairs. She did not know that young Bulstrode had said to her father in a moment of triumph:

"Thank God, Mr. Veresy, we've got hold of a mug."

And that, her father, red as a lobster, had thumped the solicitor's table and cried:

"Don't you ever say such a thing again. Thank God we've got hold of an honourable and chivalrous gentleman."

That was why, in his talk with Paula, he had called him "a damn good fellow." She remembered his encomiums and applied them to her construction of the facts.

And only one conclusion could she draw. Pandolfo hovered like some grotesque and foolish god over the Chadford household. The three of them lived there practically under the shadow of his benignity. What else was the solution? Myrtilla, as ignorant as herself of their father's real financial standing, had been forced to sell horses and pictures in order to provide for household expenses. Out of the proceeds she could meet these for a considerable time to come; but, whereas once Mr. Veresy

talked gloomily of facing ruin like a gentleman, he now seemed to take it as the jest of a sportive Providence.

"What's the meaning of it?" she asked Myrtilla whom, least of all mortals, did she desire to take into her confidence.

Myrtilla shrugged her shoulders and bade her ask Bulstrode.

She was on the point of taking Mrytilla's ironical counsel when Pandolfo himself appeared, in answer to her letter.

Pargiter impressed by vast car, title, and Napoleonic authority had, without question, divested him of coats, and throwing open morning-room door, had announced:

"Sir Victor Pandolfo."

Paula rose from her chilly window table, where she had been writing, with a little gasp of surprise. He advanced, both hands outstretched to greet her. He gripped hers. Pargiter closed the door noiselessly.

"Even more beautiful than my memories and my dreams," said he.

She laughed. "And you more—exotic than ever." She freed herself and moved across the room. "And being exotic, you must be chilled to the bone this dripping and dreary day. Come to the fire and warm yourself. Where have you come from?"

"Our works—the Paulinium works in Staffordshire. I go down periodically to supervise progress. . . . I thought that in ten minutes speech with you I could tell you more of thanks than in all the letters in the world."

She glanced at the rococo clock on the mantelpiece which marked half-past twelve.

"Ten minutes? But that's absurd. You stay to lunch."

"I must be in London this afternoon—and it's about a hundred miles."

"You stay to lunch, or not a moment do you have of my company."

In a flash, her hand was on the knob of the door. To turn any casual visitor out fasting into the dismal sleet was unthinkable; least of all the man who had nearly broken his neck and half broken his heart for her sake. He wavered.

"What we can give you to eat, God and the cook only know. But, at any rate, we can kill the peacock."

He made a gesture of submission. She rang the bell, gave a hurried order to an invisible Pargiter and shut the door.

"But this," said he, "is not the day for peacocks. The day will come, with the realization of all my dreams. Oh yes. My dreams have always included a peacock served, Renaissance style, in all its arrogance and splendour. And it shall be for you and me alone, in the dining-room of an old Italian palace, with a beautifully vaulted ceiling and great thick walls and embrasured windows looking over the hills of Vallombrosa."

"And it will be tough and tasteless, and the vaulted dining-room will be as cold as death, and the hills will be hidden by miserable rain. No, my dear friend, that is where you make your fundamental mistake. I'm not a Romantic."

"I've not had the audacity to wonder what you are," said he. "I only know that the sight of you is wonderful."

She crossed before him and sat, thus turning her back on him for a fraction of a second. Facing him now, she motioned him to a chair.

"I too am glad to see you, for one or two reasons. There's a certain picking of bones. . . ."

"The Car of Misfortune! Don't speak of it! You shall have your Paulinium car no matter what happens. And it shall be built this time to your specification. A one seater sedan chair kind of thing—two-mouse power—which you could learn to drive in five minutes and would do its fifty miles a gallon and could be washed down like a perambulator by a house-maid. I've started work on the design already and I'll finish it on the voyage."

"Voyage?"

He was for ever startling her. The words put her for the moment off the track of the bone to pick, which had nothing to do with Paulinium or the car.

"Yes," he cried eagerly. "I've got so many things to tell you, that they're all struggling to get out simultaneously. I must go to Brazil. The Paulinium mines—or rather the mines of the ore that are the secret of Paulinium, are up-country and want cleansing with the Fear of God. I'm carrying a supply with me. When I come back there'll be no more flaws in Paulinium. Not only your car but railway lines and battleships will last till the Day of Judgment."

"I'm sure of it," she smiled. "I know that tremendous inventions are only perfected after infinite experiment. But do believe that I've been sympathizing with you far more than I can say."

He assured her that her letter was balm for wounded vanity. He had passed through a desperate season of depression. The house in Tite Street had been a Doubting Castle, he himself Giant Despair and he had dreaded walking through the Slough of Despond of the London streets. Her words were like an angelic message making

clear and pure the murky air. Faith was the solvent of all things and she had faith in Paulinium. The combination of her spirituality and his materialism would eventually bear them up to heaven in a Paulinium chariot. Paula murmured an adequate accompaniment to his dithyrambics. At last looking at the clock.

"In ten minutes," she said, "my father will be summoned from his library, my sister from her boudoir, where she has been inking her fingers, face and hair over household accounts, and we two from here. We haven't much time before lunch for the bones I have to pick. I know it seems starting a meal at the wrong end," she laughed, "like a cinema film worked backwards—but still —here we are—— Why have you bought up all these mortgages?"

"I wasn't aware that you knew."

"A child would know. Why did you do it?"

"A sound investment."

"You were acting against my very definitely expressed wishes."

"It pleased your temporarily divine unreason to be angry with me. I discounted it, as I discounted another announcement."

He rose and holding her with his bright eyes, stood over her, with arms folded; and he said very quietly:

"It's no use your struggling against Fate, Paula. You've got to be mine one of these days, and you know it as well as I do."

She rose superb and snapped her fingers.

"My friend, I'm not going to be yours as long as you've got a penny you think you can buy me with!"

He turned away with a wave of the hand. "You hurt," said he.

"I meant to."

He flashed round. "Why? What have I done?"

"In order to win my—esteem let us call it, you have bought up the mortgages and have told my dear but entirely unbusinesslike father that he needn't worry about paying interest. You're keeping the roof above our heads. Do you think that's an agreeable position for a proud woman? Do you think I'm going to fall into your arms with a 'thank you, thank you for saving an ancient family from ruin, and, out of gratitude, I am yours for ever.' Use common sense, my good friend."

He passed his hand over his crisp auburn hair. "I adore to see you like that. You remind me more than ever of the Paola Malatesta who married the great Pandolfo of Rimini. But, pardon me, if I say so—you are beating the air. There has been no question of remission of interest between Mr. Veresy and myself. I assure you."

She said bewildered: "I know you well enough not to do you the injustice of doubting your word."

He made a somewhat ironical gesture of acknowledgment.

"I have the vanity, as you doubtless have discovered, of thinking myself a great many great things. But I'm not a great liar."

"Will you explain then, why my father couldn't afford to pay the other mortgagees and he can pay you."

"Readily, my dear." He smiled. "It's a mere question of a business man's personal interest in Mr. Veresy's financial affairs. The late mortgagees cared not a fig. Why should they? I come along with lawyers, accountants, stockbrokers, and bankers, a whole army of experts, and we find that with a little manipulation here, a little judicious investment there, a little thumb-screwing of a certain gentleman——"

"Monte Dangerfield?"

"Ah! You know. Well, we arranged a certain compromise in order to avoid a lawsuit. Everything has helped, you see. I can't say that we have restored Mr. Veresy to his position as a rich man. Alas, that is not possible, at present. In the future, who knows? But at any rate, his solvency is assured, and if he is content with a modest scale of living, there is no reason why he should leave this beautiful ancestral home."

The last three florid words were accompanied by one of his sweeping gestures. Paula winced as at a jangled chord. If only he had said, like anybody else: "this jolly old house!"

He waited for a while and then took a step nearer and in a low tone:

"I hope you're satisfied," said he.

"I am very grateful for what you have done," said Paula.

The door opened and Mr. Veresy appeared. He shut the door all in a hurry and advanced cordially with outstretched hand to Pandolfo.

"A thousand apologies, Sir Victor. I only just learned that you were here. Really, Paula, Pargiter is growing positively senile——"

And not even a sherry and bitters and a biscuit offered after his long motor journey! Would he have one now? Or one of the modern concoctions—a cocktail? He himself was old-fashioned enough to know nothing of their making; but he was sure Paula could "fix one up" for him. That was the correct word, wasn't it?

Pandolfo declined smilingly. He defied all the doctors and never drank except at meals. Chadford, he explained, was so little off his route that he could not resist the temptation of calling to bid Mrs. Field good-bye before starting for Brazil.

"Brazil! How I envy you! A fine country. Rio Janeiro harbour! God bless my soul, how many years ago was it? . . ."

His calculations were interrupted by the entrance of Myrtilla. In a few moments luncheon was announced. Mr. Veresy compensated for the simplicity of the meal by ordering up a precious bottle of the old Johannesburg. Its exquisite perfume filled the room. Pandolfo, silencing trivial talk, held up arresting hands.

"My dear Mr. Veresy, who am I that you should bestow on me this gift of the Rhine gods?"

He passed his glass under his nose and sipped. "What? Eighteen eighty-four! It can't be possible."

Mr. Veresy thumped the leathern arm of his chair and beamed delight.

"It is. The very year." Pargiter was sent to fetch the empty bottle. "To give good wine to a man who knows is one of the greatest pleasures in life. Yes, '84. My old father laid it down. He made a speciality of Hocks. There's half a cellar full still. During the war, I couldn't bring myself to touch the stuff. Seemed unpatriotic. But now—what has the poor old wine got to do with it, anyhow? . . . By George! Fancy your spotting the vintage!"

He regarded Pandolfo as a kind of god, a modern and highly sophisticated Bacchus.

Paula, amused and interested, asked: "How did you recognize it, Sir Victor?"

"Memory. Why shouldn't you record sensations like any other facts? I tasted this wine once before the war at a castle in Silesia. I drank it again last year in the City of London. Mistake was impossible. The particular flavours of wine are like individual melodies to a musical ear. Once heard never forgotten."

"We'll have up another. Indeed as many as are left," cried Mr. Veresy, "and we'll sit down here until they're all finished. It's no use giving it to the people round about here. They prefer Moselle. Lighter and more refreshing! Or whisky and soda—very weak. If the war hadn't proved the contrary I would say it was a damn degenerate age when a man can't take his drink like a gentleman. Seems to me that the world's all upside down. A young fellow comes in and drinks lemon-squash and eats ices, and you find he's a V.C. I give it up." He drank and smiled. "Thank God I've got a palate left," said he.

"And this," said Pandolfo with a bow. He went on. "I can't give you anything better. That would be beyond the power of man. But something perhaps as good, of a different *genre*, if you would do me the honour of visiting my humble house in Tite Street. Imperial Tokay out of the cellars of the late Emperor Franz Josef. I once was in Vienna looking after a patent of mine. I had many introductions, in consequence of which I came to know the Surgeon-in-Chief to the Emperor. One night over an excellent Tokay wine he grew confidential. The Emperor suffered from many infirmities of old age. He mentioned one. No need to go into particulars. There came to me one of my usual flashes of inspiration—the inventor's flashes. 'But that,' I cried, 'can easily be remedied.' I took out a pencil and made sketches on the table cloth. The next day I sent him a complete design and specification. A free gift. It was really a very simple trumpery matter. To cut the story short, he had the appliance made, clapped it on the old Emperor, with the result that, eventually, I was presented. Then came the question of recognition. Money was out of the question. In those

days one was quite delighted to help a lame Emperor over a stile. I didn't want the Order of the Three Purple Eagles or whatever they used to give away in Austria. I wanted what no one, unless he were a Crowned Head, could get. Some of the best Imperial Tokay that lay in the vaults of the Hofburg. And I got it. I got a dozen. Court functionaries drew up in motor-cars to my hotel, and presented me with a case all over seals and imperial devices franking me through the Customs Houses of the Universe." He turned to Paula, "I always get what I want, don't I?"

She avoided the direct question. "Why haven't you told me this story before?"

"It would take me a lifetime to tell you all my stories. Haven't you realized that I'm an amateur of the Picturesque?"

"I should say an expert," said Mr. Veresy courteously.

"Call me a professional," laughed Pandolfo.

He was launched on the theme of the colour and joy and madness of Life's Adventure. He held the worn and simple Myrtilla spellbound. He was a radiant angel fallen into her little narrow world.

Confirmation of his estimate of the guest as a damn good fellow set Mr. Veresy aglow. By the end of the meal Pandolfo had established a position in at least two simple hearts. Mr. Veresy kept him in the dining-room after the ladies had retired. Myrtilla was full of questions. Why had Paula given no hint of her friendship with this most remarkable of men? Paula had to respond lamely that, in London, one met so many remarkable men that they eclipsed one another, so to speak, and individually made no impression. Whereupon Myrtilla sighed and said that Paula had all the luck.

The men came in; Pandolfo with the announcement of immediate departure. He must be in London for a great Paulinium dinner-party he was giving prior to his sailing for Brazil. Myrtilla asked: What was a Paulinium dinner-party? He threw up his hands to Paula.

"Have you said never a word for me?"

"For you? Why should I? Of you—no. No more than you've said a word of me."

Mr. Veresy and Myrtilla exchanged glances.

"Paulinium steel," said Mr. Veresy, with the air of one who knew, "is the new metal of which Sir Victor is the inventor."

"I see," murmured Myrtilla.

"And so the dinner-party—a band of believers. . . ." Pandolfo smiled in his engaging way.

Leave was taken. Mr. Veresy and Paula followed their guest into the hall where Pargiter stood by the entrance door, fur-lined coat in hand. Suddenly from the morning-room came a sharp cry.

"Father!"

With an apology the old man obeyed the summons. Myrtilla caught him by the arm.

"Don't be a dear old silly. Give the man a chance."

Mr. Veresy asked God to bless his soul and Myrtilla to explain.

"You don't suppose he came here to see you—or me. Can't you see he's over head and ears in love with Paula? They're as thick as thieves. Why should he christen his old metal Paulinium? And why should he have taken such an affectionate interest in Chadford? The dear thing gives himself away at every turn."

"That makes things rather awkward."

"On the contrary," replied Myrtilla.

"Yes—but—I can't let the fellow go without bidding him good-bye."

"Paula will see to that," Myrtilla declared. "Where's our old visitors' book?"

Unaware of the subtlety of the feminine brain, Mr. Veresy damned the book. No one had written in it for the last five years, and of its whereabouts he had no knowledge.

"I think I have," said Myrtilla. "Wait here till I come."

Meanwhile Paula and Pandolfo stood together at one end of the great staircased and balconied hall, while Pargiter stood impassive at the other.

Said he: "Tell me. To-day. At least have you been contented with my demeanour?"

She laughed. "What an odd lot of words. What do you mean?"

"I came here a starving man. Almost a wolf. Instead of saying and doing what I wanted to, I've been as discreet and colourless as our friend Babington. I deserve some thanks. Considering all things—I think I've been great!"

Like an actor, at the fall of the curtain, turning to an invited friend in the wings, he awaited his meed of praise. She wrinkled a perplexed and humorous brow.

"My dear friend, after all this time, don't you understand? If you didn't want me to marry you, there's no man in the world I'd like to love more."

"That's cold comfort," said he, "to one who needs all the warmth he can get."

For the first time during his embarrassing pursuit did he touch her heart. She felt just a faint sensation of a stab. Hitherto his love-making had been a mere invita-

tion—not to share, for everything he did was in the grand manner—but to crown his splendour. His attitude had been that of the Great Olympic Giver of All. For the very first time, therefore, he struck the very simple human chord. For the very first time he had suggested his own needs, had asked for something for himself. With an awakened intelligence she swept his face with a swift feminine glance. He had grown a shade older. There were new faint lines on his forehead and at the corners of his eyes in which there seemed to burn a strange hunger. Hers met them for a second or two very steadily. She was a woman of the modern world; a beautiful woman, inured, if such a thing were possible, to the admiration and desire of men. But in his eyes she read something apart from man's stark desire; a hunger, almost wolfish, for other things than love.

She came close to him and said in a low voice:

"Putting foolishness—you know what I mean—aside, what can I do for you? How can I help you?"

"What is the value of the goblet to a thirsty man without the wine?"

She turned aside, at loss for immediate answer, her straight English sense of language ever so slightly offended by the exotic metaphor. Not that the words did not ring true to the man. His sincerity to himself she did not question. But, as an instinctive expression of the man, they did not ring true to her. No clean-run Englishman appealing to her sympathy in an indubitably tense moment would have talked of the vanity of an empty goblet. And yet, the Latin who spoke had summoned up the whole business in a phrase.

Had she been in flippant mood, she might have suggested, by way of compromise, the filling of the goblet with soda water or lemonade. But compromise was im-

possible. Either wine—for wine is a living thing, one of the three "God's great words to man"—and at once a symbol and a gift of God's grace and love; or the mockery of the empty cup, no matter how elaborately and exquisitely garlanded.

So, as has been said, she turned her head away and made no answer. He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you know why you broke off your brief engagement to the excellent Babington? You realized that the rich vintage of yourself which you were prepared to pour out wouldn't be good for his health. I defy you to say, as I defied you the first moment we met, that it wouldn't be good for mine. What are you going to do with it? Keep it in a locked cellar, for ever and a day, so that no man can get a drink of it? Think of the wickedness of the waste, my dear!"

She said with a wry smile.

"I think, my dear friend, it's only a little *vin du pays* and has turned sour already."

"If it had, you would have thought it quite good enough for Babington."

The voice of Mr. Veresy, perhaps ostentatiously raised, came from the open door of the morning-room.

"So you've found the book at last, Myrtilla."

Paula asked swiftly: "When do you sail?"

"The day after to-morrow. Southampton. Royal Mail *Aurania*. Can't I carry away a crumb of comfort?"

Again the appeal. She felt wickedly hard-hearted. As friend she could feed him with whatever loaves and fancy bread he desired. As husband postulant she could give him naught.

"You shall have a telegram," she said.

Then, into the hall came Mr. Veresy and Myrtilla, visitors' book and fountain pen in hand. Pandolfo laughed

and, on a carefully presented virgin page, dashed off his triumphant signature.

Mr. Veresy accompanied him down the dignified flight of steps to his car. Pandolfo drove off, waving his hat, with his usual air of a conqueror.

"Splendid fellow! One of the best!"

"I'm so glad you like him, dear," said Paula demurely.

When he had retired to his study, where of afternoons he had the habit of facing ruin like a somnolent gentleman, Myrtilla turned on her sister.

"Why the—why the—why the . . . ?"

Paula took her by her lean shoulders.

"What the—what the—what the—what, has it got to do with you?"

"I'm sorry," said Myrtilla, disengaging herself. "I'm not often indiscreet. But this is so obvious."

"And the poor dear," said Paula, "thought no one could possibly have guessed his secret. He himself told me so."

Myrtilla the faded, elderly image of Paula, laughed in her turn.

"Men are idiots, aren't they?" And after a pause: "But, you, darling—you see it's of such enormous interest to us all—what are you going to do about it?"

"I'm going to find a nice little undiscovered, uncharted island in the middle of the Pacific," replied Paula, "and I'm going to sit there for the rest of my days."

"Women like you," said Myrtilla a trifle sourly, "make me tired."

Perhaps this was the first time in their lives that their English reserve had allowed them to talk nakedly. And Paula saw that they were poles apart. Brief though her joy had been, she had had life's glorious fulfilment. She had loved; she had borne a child; death had been but that fulfilment's sanctification. She had gone forth again into

the world, humorously regally conscious of every man's desire. Like every beautiful and virtuous woman she had her own unconsciously woven scale of values. She never doubted that, in her world, other decent women had the same. Her mind was too delicate and her preoccupation with material things too insistent for anything approaching morbid self-analysis. The great sweet people of the world do not worry about themselves. It is only the little diseased folk that love to turn themselves inside out and discuss their poor little psychical insides thus exposed in either private or general company. The strong and the sane give themselves in robust objectivity to the world. So Paula Field.

A defect, it might be of her qualities that until that moment of her sister's exclamation, she had not recognized the cry of the starved woman.

She replied lamely:

"But, Myrty darling, how can one marry a man one doesn't love?"

Myrtilla stood tragically in front of her, worked into a rare and sudden passion, so that her withered beauty started into intense loveliness.

"Love! What does it matter so long as a man wants one? You've been wanted all your life. No man has ever wanted me——" she shook her hands in front of her, in unprecedented gesture. "You throw away God's gifts as if they were nothing, while I would be contented with any crumb that fell from the table. I have no patience with you. I hate you!"

She flung out.

Paula went to the window and looked on the desolate and dripping winter garden. For a moment she regarded apathetically the forlorn female statue. Then her fancy worked. That it should spring into fantastic, Bacchantic

Maenadic life were less a miracle than the staid Myrtilla's outburst.

Then suddenly she turned away and swept her brows with impatient hands. What on earth could Myrtilla know about it? You must love a man . . . you must. . . . Oh, the whole thing was impossible.

CHAPTER XIV

THE last visit Pandolfo paid before sailing was to Lady Demeter. At six o'clock in the afternoon, according to telephonic arrangement, he burst into her drawing-room where, according to her account of the interview, he behaved like a tornado. He had the audacity to upbraid her for wrong counsel.

"I've seen her."

"Well?"

"Just the same as ever."

"I'm surprised," said Clara.

He declared he was not. He had lost three months. A woman wanted wooing, not neglect, as she had advised. And now he must lose two months more. It would take him at least two months to get out to Brazil, go up country, flay alive the scoundrels who were mismanaging the mines and get back again. Lady Demeter suggested that Paula must have been pleased to see him.

"Pleased! She was kind, she was hospitable. I was cold and hungry and she took me in. She could do no less. But when it came to grips, the same old story. *Tout ce que vous voudrez, mais pas ça.* Everything you want but that! And *that*—to marry her—Good God! is all I want. I'm a man—look at me!" He thumped his chest and braced his biceps. "Am I the sort to be content with a flower thrown from her window like a mildewed *minnesinger?*"

"You haven't yet told me what actually happened."

Even his exuberant fancy could not fill in the meagre detail. Reference to the mortgages which had formed the

main subject of the conversation he omitted. That side of things had nothing to do with Lady Demeter. At the end of his tale, she said:

"At any rate she promised a telegram."

"What's the good of that? Paula Field sending her heart along a bit of wire? Absurd! No. 'Bon voyage.' That's all it will be."

Lady Demeter declared afterwards that the wind of his movements stirred the drawn winter curtains.

He went on:

"This Fabian policy is at an end. There shall be no more hiding in the background. She shall have letters, cables, monkeys, marmosets, gold nuggets, from me every day. She shall learn that without me, life is impossible. She shall learn to look on me as a necessity."

Comfortable Lady Demeter waited until his fury was more or less spent.

"Why, my dear Victor, are you so particularly set on marrying Paula?"

"Why?" He looked at her as though she had asked him why he desired food when a-hungered. "She is created for me and I for her. We're complementary. Could the world provide a more perfect pair?"

She smiled inwardly at the flamboyant egotism. Indictment on the count, however, would but lead to useless wrangling. She came down to lower levels.

"If only men had a little sense! Did it never occur to you to make violent love—before her eyes, of course—to another woman?"

He spread out his arms. "Is there another woman?"

"My poor friend," said Lady Demeter.

He took his leave, and, the next day, set sail for South America. Gregory Uglow and a fellow director or so of "Paulinium Steel, Ltd." saw him off at Waterloo.

On board the *Aurania* at Southampton, he found the promised telegram.

"My sincerest good wishes follow you. Paula."

Making the best of the nourishment provided for the hungry lover, he sucked whatever juice there was in every word. She was not one who spoke idly. Her good wishes were good wishes; she declared them sincere; that they should follow him on his adventures was, on her part, a solemn undertaking. And for the first time, she acquiesced in the familiarity of the Christian name. Yet, in this pregnant message, he could discover nothing but friendship. As usual she held her real self tantalizingly aloof. It was the same cold comfort. Had she given a hint of a promise, the murk of Southampton waters would have been irradiated by gleams of gold.

It was a dismal and depressing day. Decks and hatchways and taffrails of the great steamer were sticky with moisture. Fog loomed ahead in the Channel. The queerly assorted mass of humanity issuing out of the warm train had gathered on their garments myriads of globules of dampness. There was a steam of breaths. As he went aboard in the midst of the surging mass of passengers, he had the exacerbating sensation of being but an unrecognized and inconsiderable member of a horde. It was only after having awaited his turn in a decorous group before the purser's office, and handed his card, and a spry clerk had said cheerily: "Yes, Sir Victor, there's a wire for you," that his spirits leaped at the recognition of his individuality. Paula once had said that he must suffer agonies of obscurity in a foreign city.

He tore open the telegram and went below in search of his cabin. The port-holes were shut and the glass obscured by mist. The room, in its stark formality and stagnation of air reminded him of a prison cell. He bade

his waiting valet for God's sake turn off the steam heating.

On deck again he watched the movements almost as aimless as ants—of the throng of humans. The signal went for visitors to go ashore. He stood by the gangway and was witness to the multifarious leave-takings. The parting hug of women's arms around men's necks gave him a queer sensation of heart-ache. Every fresh-faced man—even some of the swarthy homeward-bound—seemed to have some living link with woman, sundered, of a sudden, by the inexorable syren-whistle. He, *solus mortalium,* was desolate. Only the crumpled telegram in his pocket suggested a tenuous bond.

The vast steamer glided away. The quay in front of the dirty and ignoble sheds became alive with waving hats and fluttering handkerchiefs. The dull red-brick mass of the London and South Western Hotel stood out ironical, expressive neither of *vale* nor of *ave,* of welcome nor of farewell. Pandolfo crossed to the other side of the deck, and stared at the vague outline of the Isle of Wight just discernible through the fog.

Perhaps for the first time in his vivid, all-conquering life, he was oppressed by the eternal sadness of things. Why had he not brought Gregory Uglow to Southampton, so that one human soul, at least, should have waved a farewell hand to him, from the quay? His self-sufficiency had forbidden the concession to sentiment. He had been strongly tempted to take the young man with him to Brazil for the sake of human companionship. But that was impossible. Uglow must stay in London, his confidential representative, intellectual, possessive of all secrets, diplomatic, able to cope with the Board of Directors of "Paulinium Steel, Ltd." which was growing restive. Gregory had certain powers of attorney. Armed with those he could block the sinister activities of

an abominable fellow, one Joram, to whose appointment as secretary an equally abominable, though at first, plausibly amenable director, had induced him to consent. Joram, in a wormy Levantine way, had already insinuated doubts as to the infallibility of the great Pandolfo. Why this Brazilian journey, he was reported to have asked, at the critical moment of the Company's fortunes? Gregory must deal with the beast until his return, when he would lift him by his collar, 'twixt finger and thumb, and drop him out of the fifth floor window of the City offices of "Paulinium Steel, Ltd." In some such terms had he explained his motives to Gregory.

His valet interrupted disconsolate meditation by asking him to choose a pitch for his deck chair. Pandolfo waved him away.

"The best and sunniest and most sheltered."

The valet, a pound note in hand, consulted the deck-steward.

"For Gawd's sake tell me which it is, for if it isn't, Gawd 'elp me."

The deck-steward told him.

Now, one of the minor annoyances of ocean-travel is this specified location of your deck-chair. No matter whether the sun scorches you or the winds freeze your marrow, in that one same seat must you sit the whole voyage through, unless you are one of those prowling trespassers whose name is anathema on ship-board. There, in proximity to neighbours whose language you may detest, whose perfume artificial or otherwise you may much dislike, who invariably crackle newspapers when you want to sleep, must you recline if you desire to enjoy, in repose, the full joy of sea and sky. No hotel in its senses would ear-mark its garden seats for specific guests; no guests in their senses would stand it. And yet

generation after generation of ocean passengers submit with lamb-like meekness to the tyranny of a corporation of monopolists known as the Oceanic Chair Company. Why steamers cannot provide deck-chairs, just as they provide unrestricted sitting accommodation in saloon and smoking-rooms is a mystery.

This enforced juxtaposition of individuals on a steamer's deck is responsible for many tragedies. Steamship companies dare not compile statistics of the passengers pushed overboard on dark nights by neighbours who have returned purring to the side of the thenceforward vacant chair. It has been responsible for embarrassing acquaintanceships, friendships ever after to be regretted, and mephitic cargoes of scandal. It is responsible for a devil of a lot of other things; among them the meeting day after day of Pandolfo and a lady.

For the first few days of vile weather—indeed, it blew a gale—Pandolfo sat on the promenade deck, in the chair which his admirable valet, acting on the highly paid professional advice of the deck-steward, had set in the most perfect spot to leeward, in comfortable solitude. Left hand neighbour had he none. The kindly tempest had swept at least eight chairs to his right free of occupants. He noticed that the visiting card slipped into the brass fitment on the chair beside him bore the inscription "Comtesse de Bréville". Spanish names appeared next, a family party; then "Mr. John P. Cotton" and "Mrs. John P. Cotton," and so on, in uninteresting category.

The calm and sunshine of the fourth morning magically filled the hitherto desolate decks. Among the new arrivals Pandolfo greeted an acquaintance or two; General and Lady Fairfield starting on a trot round the globe; Pelham Foxe, an eminent engineer bound for work at

Buenos Aires. The world seemed brighter. The Fairfields invited him to their table in the dining saloon. The head-steward would arrange the transfer. He accepted gladly. The one stalwart eater at his own table was a dried American who gave the impression that having been talked at for years by his wife and daughter (still in the cabin stage) he had lost the power of speech. Now, though Pandolfo was a talker, he scorned pure monologue, and the monosyllabic interlocutor bored him. On the other hand, the General was a cheery person who had soldiered all over the world and commanded a division in France; and his wife, like many good soldiers' wives, took a philosophic and amusing view of the universe. In a charming way they made clear their recognition of the importance of the Great Pandolfo. The dried American had apparently never heard of him, or, if he had, seemed deeply unimpressed. He sunned himself in his friends' gentle flattery. Foxe, too, greeted him with some enthusiasm.

"I saw your name on the passenger list and was looking forward to seeing you. But this infernal gale—my first time up. You're looking splendid—as though you hadn't missed a meal since Southampton."

"I haven't," said Pandolfo.

"Lucky fellow. And where are you off to?"

"Brazil. I've some mines to look at in the Andes."

"Luckier still. I've got to sweat all the time in a Buenos Aires office over blue-prints."

Yes. After all, it was a pleasant world, and he not its least fortunate inhabitant. Anyhow he had a stomach defiant of wind and wave and had a couple of months of God's fresh air before him. His pity for Pelham Foxe raised him in his own esteem. He went for a tramp around the decks with quickened pulses and springing

step, despising the decrepit of all ages and sexes who lay or crawled about huddled up in overcoats and wraps on that blue and sunny morning when the salt of the sea on the lips was like a Naiad's kisses. He scorned an overcoat, smiled a contemporary smile on the young men attired bravely like himself, hatless, jackets open showing the gaudy silk-bound knitted waistcoat. He stopped to watch a game of deck-quoits which youth, an English quartette, boys and maidens, had just started. The latter looked radiantly fresh in their white jerseys and Alpine sport caps—a stimulating touch of Aurora. He retrieved a rolling ring thrown to one of them and stood with it in hand while she made an awkward cast. He stepped forward.

"Forgive me. There's a knack. It's very simple. Just this."

He made a motion of arm and wrist. She gave him a swift, appraising glance; then laughed in confidence.

"So?"

She cast and missed.

"Nearly right. Watch."

He threw. The rope ring fell delicately over the middle peg. He laughed in his turn, waved both his arms with a *voilà!* and went on his way triumphant.

His walk over, he descended to his cabin to seek a book, a detective story of great promise which he had begun the night before. He only had one more with him. That was the only spot of failure in an otherwise perfect world: the lamentable scarcity of good detective novels. On deck again, he looked into the Winter Garden. Pallid Southerners sat dismal on the cane chairs and settees. Profound pity raised his spirits still higher. Why did they remain bat-like instead of seeking the sunshine and

the sweet salt breeze and the joy of the white network of foam in the cups of the mild and dark blue waves?

Book in hand, he mounted to the promenade deck, feasted his senses for a while on that which the pallid Southerners seemed to despise, and went in search of his chair. At first it was difficult, for the crowded row bore a different aspect from the gaunt array of the previous days. At last he found it, tucked away in its corner by the turn of the companion. The next one was occupied by a lady; presumably the Comtesse de Bréville whose card he had read. Elegantly be-rugged she was in the act of taking a bowl of soup from the deck-steward's laden tray. It was about eleven o'clock. Why a jorum of Scotch-broth between breakfast and lunch should be considered essential to human support is another of the mysteries of the sea. Yet, like most mysteries, it can have its elements of comedy. The steward unbent from the lady, and, in brisk sea-fashion turned on Pandolfo. Pandolfo smiled and swept a declining gesture. His hand caught the edge of the tray. The steward performed a trick of legerdemain; but all his skill could not prevent a bowl falling on the lady's rug. She uttered a little cry of dismay and spilled half her own cup. The steward broke into horrified apology. Pandolfo, with masterful hand, extricated her from the soaked covering, and, snatching up his own which his man had placed in readiness on the adjoining chair, in words of authority put it at her entire disposal. He spoke in French. The lady replied in the same tongue. She could not dream of depriving him of his rug.

"Madame," said he, in his most Pandolfian manner, "if you don't use it, I will throw it overboard."

She yielded, allowed him to fix it round her. She

murmured her thanks. Pandolfo snatched the rug from the rueful steward who was trying to repair damages with a napkin, bowed and marched away with it over his shoulder.

"Who is that?" asked the lady.

The steward looked at the card on the chair back.

"That's Sir Victor Pandolfo. I overheard one gentleman say to another: 'that's the great Pandolfo.' I took him for a variety artist; but as he's a 'Sir', he can't be."

He picked up his tray and with further apologies hurried away to make up for lost time in supplying the wants of famished passengers.

Presently Pandolfo appeared.

"Madame," said he, "my valet, who knows more about the taking out of stains than any man on earth—otherwise I should not employ him—assured me that your beautiful fawn-coloured rug is irretrievably ruined. The one you have around you is the poorest return I can make."

"Impossible."

"Such a word, Madame, does not exist in my vocabulary."

She looked up at him and laughed, and said in pure English: "If you're Sir Victor Pandolfo, you must be an Englishman."

"I am."

"Then I don't see the point of our talking in a foreign language."

"But you," said he, motioning to her chair-back, "are the Comtesse de Bréville."

"Quite so. But my father was an eminent divine in Ely."

"And you married a Frenchman?"

"You've guessed my secret."

He sat down by her side. It was the obvious thing to do, the offended lady being in a forgiving and conversational mood.

"It's absurd," she said. "I can't accept your rug. It's of the finest wool, and worth ten times mine, which is only a common old thing."

"I have them made specially for me. By the dozen," he declared. "A secret process. I carry a bale about with me in case of such emergencies. I beg you to let the unhappy incident be closed, with some degree of happiness to myself."

"We'll discuss the matter again when your man has cleaned the rug."

"He is too wise to attempt it. Besides, it is already thrown away. At the best it would be a lamentable makeshift. I have no use for makeshifts."

"But, unfortunately, I have," said the Comtesse de Bréville.

He indicated the rug on her knees.

"Unfortunately," said he, with a bow.

"It's awfully kind of you," said she, and settled herself luxuriously under the soft wool.

She smiled at him with the air of a woman conscious of attraction. He smiled back with the air of a gallant man doing homage to feminine charms. Her voice was soft, an excellent thing in woman. She had dark blue eyes that laughed with a touch of sadness behind them. The sudden sea-air, after days' confinement in her cabin, had whipped colour into her cheeks. Little masses of dark brown hair appeared on each side beneath the brim of her travelling toque. Her lips were mobile and her teeth were those of a young girl. Yet a line or two here and there betrayed the woman of the middle thirties.

She turned, with the faintest suggestion of a sigh, and

opened her book. Pandolfo opened his. The incident was closed. Had she been a child of fourteen or a harridan of seventy, he would have behaved in the same grand, Pandolfian way, such conduct being the man's tribute to himself. He had the power of instant concentration. No sooner had he found his place than he became absorbed in the intrigue. Meanwhile the woman scanned his face from beneath lowered eyelids and her lips closed somewhat thin and hard.

The acquaintance thus made was continued from day to day, mainly through the forced companionship of the adjoining deck-chairs. He learned something of her history, which appeared to be a simple one. She was the daughter of a Canon of Ely. Sent to school in France to finish her education, she spent a vacation or two at the house of a French fellow-pupil. There she met the Comte de Bréville, who fell in love with her and married her, to the contentment of relations on both sides. But the marriage had not been a happy one, owing to Bréville's obtuseness in not recognizing that the upkeep of two establishments was incompatible with perfect conjugal felicity. They had separated and gone their respective ways. Now he was dead.

She was going she knew not exactly whither. It was a voyage of distraction. Although she had a comfortable flat in Paris, for years she had been living on the branch, at Biarritz, Monte Carlo, Deauville, Florence, Palermo, New York, wherever leaves seemed to be green. She hated things that were cold and grey and shuddered at Ely in its misty marshes. Besides, her father had died there long ago. Of rheumatism of the soul, she said.

She was a lonely bird, blown about the world. Of friends or acquaintances on board save those made

casually, she had none. Pandolfo pitied her, yet upbraided her for lack of aim in life. She smiled enigmatically. Perhaps she had one. What was it? She replied in French; it was her secret.

Fine weather followed them. Past Saint-Vincent, half way across to Rio, the sea fell to a dead calm and the sun blazed down tropically. At night a full moon shone upon the waters, ironically romantic.

It was late. Pandolfo sat on the promenade deck with the Fairfields and Pelham Foxe. Elderly loungers had retired to bed. The young were dancing on a deck below, and the strains of the music rose faintly. The deck was deserted. The lazy talk of the moonlight drifted to the personalties of fellow-travellers.

"Who is the pretty lady I have seen you talking to?" asked Lady Fairfield.

"The Comtesse de Bréville."

"Bréville—Bréville——" Pelham Foxe tapped a dome-like forehead. "Where have I heard that name?"

"Her husband seems to have been a notorious profligate," said Pandolfo.

"No—no—it's the lady. Wait—yes. Two years ago in Montevideo."

"It can't be the lady in question," said Pandolfo, "because this is her first visit to South America."

Foxe conceded with a smile. "Then I'm wrong," said he.

But he sat silent for a while, knitting his brow.

"Now I come to think of it, the name was Tréville. I beg the lady's pardon. This was a very beautiful woman —by report—I never saw her—but there was a nine days' scandal. A young American shot himself in the hotel corridor outside her bedroom door. And pinned to his coat

was a piece of paper on which he had scribbled: "As I have given you my last penny, so have I given you my last drop of blood."

"How romantic," said Lady Fairfield.

"Silly ass!" said the General.

He rose and shook himself like a dog, being a man of full habit.

"The man who spends his last penny on a woman ought to be put in a lethal chamber."

His wife hugged his arm. "Then you ought to have been put out of the way many times, old dear."

He laughed a jolly laugh, and disengaging his arm, folded it bear-like around her slim shoulders.

"I always laid it out at a million per cent interest," said he.

On this pleasant conjugal incident, the party broke up. Foxe confessed to a desire for slumber. Pandolfo was left alone. He went to the forward taffrail to get the most of the breeze made by the ship's course and looked far down on the main-deck below. A belated couple, probably second-class passengers, had wandered thither and leaned over the side, watching the night, their arms clasped around each other. After a while he saw their little white specks of faces turn and their lips meet in a kiss.

"They're happy, at any rate," said a voice by his side.

He started. It was the Comtesse de Bréville.

"I've been dancing and it's all over. And I thought I'd come up here for air before going to bed. What a wonderful night."

He assented, rather gloomily. "Yes, wonderful."

There was a silence during which, impelled perhaps by the same motives, they watched the lovers. Now the man had both his arms around her and she held her head

back, so that she could look into his eyes, and then kissed him passionately. It was so far down that it seemed a drama of fantocchini: yet to the man and woman looking on, it was very real.

She said: "I would give my soul for such happiness."

"My God! So would I," he cried.

She touched the back of his clenched hand lightly with a finger. Her words came very soft and low.

"There's a woman in your life. Tell me."

The sound of a voice must have reached the couple on the far down deck, for they looked up and beheld the half body of a man with uplifted and gesticulating hands, silhouetted against the moonlit sky.

It was Pandolfo telling of the wonder of Paula Field.

CHAPTER XV

On a Sunday morning in early May, Gregory Uglow sat solitary by the bowling-green of Hinsted Park, going through a portfolio of flimsy typed documents. They were very worrying and very contradictory, and, as he studied them, by no means for the first time, his face grew pinched with anxiety. Presently he clenched his hands in a little despairing gesture and looked up to heaven for inspiration.

At that moment, Paula, entering by the path between the high box hedges that separated the green from the terraced lawn sweeping down from the Elizabethan front of Hinsted, caught him unawares. She stood for a few seconds, white and regal, embowered in green, until the young man's eyes, baffled by heaven, were held by the more significant vision.

He threw his portfolio on the rustic bench and rose and they met midway on the green.

"You look the picture of woe."

He regarded her with wry humour.

"I'm afraid I've been sitting for my portrait."

"Are things as bad as that?"

"You've no idea," he replied with a rueful laugh, "how bad things can be till they set themselves to work."

She took his arm lightly and together they crossed to the garden seat.

"And on such a beautiful May morning."

He sighed: "If it weren't for you, I should go crazy."

"Any news?"

He caught up some sheets and laid them down again. "Just business matters."

"He doesn't say when he's coming home?"

"No. Still detained. Experimenting on the spot. I'm to carry on here as best I can. I wish I could. That's the worst of not being a superman like him."

"But you've told him about Joram and Innwater and the gang generally?"

"Of course," said Gregory.

From which conversation it may be gathered that Paula Field was more conversant with the inner workings of "Paulinium Steel, Ltd." than she was on the winter day of sleet when she had last seen Pandolfo.

He had been away for five months; the limit which he had set himself had been two. A month from Rio Janeiro and back; a fortnight for the journey to and from the mines in the Andes; a fortnight to put the fear of God into the workers of the mines. He was three months overdue.

Had it not been for Gregory Uglow, Paula, perhaps, would have felt little anxiety. But the strain of suspense had obviously been affecting the health of that peculiarly interesting and sympathetic young man. That he was some years older than herself didn't matter. Compared with Pandolfo in his forties, he was young, and, until she realized her juniority, she had been wont to regard him with pleasant grandmaternal sentiment.

Their coming together, for the first time since her many-incidented stay in Rênes-les-Eaux, had been, like most things mundane, a matter of unromantic commonplace. *Mirabile dictu,* there had not been the least idea of intrigue in the head or the heart of Lady Demeter.

Early in the year Lady Demeter and Paula had made up whatever there was of quarrel between them. In

letters and telephone talks Clare had signified a penitent holding out of the olive-branch.

"You're the most exasperating proud cat of a woman I know," she wrote; "but you're the only woman in the world I care for, and I can't get on without you. Whether I've been right or wrong, everything I've done has been with a view to your happiness. It's horrid of you not to realize it. Anyhow, if I promise not to worry any more about you, but let you go to rack and ruin without stretching out a hand to save you, will you let me come down and see you and put me up for the night, so that we can clean up everything?"

Clara came. Paula met her at the station with the ramshackle Ford and took a very happy lady to Chadford Park.

"After all, it's very stupid," said Clara.

"Idiotic," said Paula.

"I suppose, if you can't, you can't and there's an end of it."

"That's it."

"Do forgive me."

In the ramshackle Ford, Paula threw her arms around her friend and kissed her and called her a darling old thing and thus the friendship was re-established. In the house, Paula showed her a pre-paid cable under the tacit convention that there should be no comment, which she had received from Pandolfo soon after his arrival at Rio Janeiro. He had written it in French, evidently to baffle the curiosity, and stay the gossip, of the presumable young woman in the little Chadford post-office. In English it ran:

"Say definitely if I may hope. Most urgent."

"And you replied?" asked Clara.

" 'Can't help your hoping, my dear friend, but what is the good? What I said at our last meeting stands.' "

"That must have been awfully expensive," said the practical Clara.

"I only used up half the words he credited me with," said Paula.

"Just like him!" sighed Lady Demeter.

"And the funny part of it is," continued Paula, "that I've not had a word from him since. Have you?"

"No. Only heard of him from Gregory Uglow."

Paula pricked her ears. Had Clara kept up acquaintance with the young man? Lady Demeter proclaiming him a dear, gave Paula to understand that she had caught him and set him in the most intimate section of her menagerie. Not much of a lion at present—it was Paula who translated her friend's account into terms of metaphor—he might reasonably develop a sonorous roar one of these days. Meanwhile he was the most skilful lion-tamer's assistant that ever existed. He could make himself agreeable to anybody. Why, the other day at Hinsted—that awful Boxer woman, Miss Virginia Boxer —"cursed, you see, my dear, from birth, by her very godfathers and godmothers"—the great authority on Birth-rate and Malthus and Unmarried Mothers and Unwanted Babies—and all those dreadful things. Oh! an unspeakable female, with a face like a scorbutic sergeant of Dragoons—"You know, my dear, the sort of creature you see in pictures of Napoleon—and with much less knowledge of babies and how to get them." What was she saying? Well—this Boxer woman; she simply had to ask her down; she was leading a Royal Commission by the nose, and the newspapers were full of her. She came. Spread consternation around. Wiped the floor

with Spencer Babington and threw him limp into a corner terrified at the possibility of having an unwanted baby—Clara Demeter could be picturesque when she chose—treated dear, darling Calithorpe, the great gynæcologist, like a little innocent boy and told him to go and play among the daisies, made old Lady Susan Mottbury, the mother of ten, so please you, wonder whether she had done it, how she had done it, and why the whole lot, instead of flourishing in riotous health, had not been death-stricken the day they were born.

"They were all bolting on Sunday, my dear," said Clara, "sending telegrams to themselves. In despair, I turned Gregory on to her. Somehow he kept her quiet and all was well. A social genius, that young man. I came across them in the evening talking astronomy. I asked him afterwards how he had managed to get her off babies and on to stars. He laughed and said: 'Perhaps *via* the Milky Way.' He's such a dear."

She continued her eulogy. Yes, she had adopted him, for everybody loved him. Even Demeter. One week-end, when Gregory had refused—through pride or something silly—Demeter himself had gone and routed him out of Tite Street— "And when Demeter sets out to be gracious, I've never met anybody who could resist him," said the good wife.

All this from Lady Demeter to show how it had come about that Gregory Uglow had allowed himself to become attached to her household.

Clara, looking round the desolate and faded house, once, as she remembered it from pleasant experience, so bright in its quiet luxury and warm in that curious living comfort that arises from noiseless, invisible, efficient service, shivered with commiseration for Paula. She had not counted on such poverty-stricken dreariness. Par-

giter, an old acquaintance, questioned amiably as to his general well-being, replied that he was well in health but—"things aren't what they were, m'lady." And he shook his head with the air of the mildewed old steward of the play. Mr. Veresy, an old friend, beamed jollity upon her, and gave her the picture of a fine old English gentleman facing ruin with a stout heart. Myrtilla asked her anxiously to recommend the cheapest place in London where she could make up the store of common table linen.

"Why you must have mountains of it," cried Lady Demeter.

"Of the best, yes," sighed Myrtilla, "but I don't think we can afford to use it."

The only serene and apparently unconscious person in the house was Paula. Her silence as to fallen fortunes closed Clara's lips; she could only convey her sympathy obliquely. It was time for Paula to reappear in the world. She admitted that life in the country conduced to bodily health; but insinuated that it also led to stagnation of the soul. Why shouldn't she carry off Paula then and there for a life-giving month in London?

"Because, my dear, it would prevent me from earning enough money to have a little life-giving time on my own," laughed Paula.

There were her weekly articles; there were books to review, a recent source of income; and there was her novel which was either going to sputter out like a damp squib, or go flaring up like a rocket amid the gasping of the literary world. She was stuffing the cartridge with wickedness, beauty and laughter and she couldn't leave off till she had finished. She was perfectly happy. In two or three months she hoped to be through with it. She had been playing about with the materials in the rough for over a year. Since she had sat down at Chad-

ford, it was only a question of putting them artistically together.

"Well, when you've finished the horrid thing you'll come to me, won't you? If you don't, I'll be miserable."

Paula, to avoid condemnation of her friend to misery, consented.

In April the complete manuscript was sent to the publisher of her first novel, who having read the first half and a sketched scenario of this second one, had given her a fair contract providing for a modest advance in respect of royalties on delivery, and Paula, with money to burn, burned a considerable amount of it in the purlieus of Bond Street and, clothing herself in the filmy results of the smoke, took up her abode for a time with Clara Demeter.

And so it came to pass that on a May morning she sat with Gregory Uglow by the box-hedge enclosed bowling green of the ancient Elizabethan Manor of Hinsted. This was by no means the first time they had met since Rênes-les-Eaux. He had lunched and dined at the Demeter's in London. He had come down to Hinsted for the previous week-end. Hence her conversance with the inner workings of "Paulinium Steel, Ltd." and the recalcitrance of the dreadful gang represented by Joram and Innwater.

Starlings, in the just leafing walnut trees beyond the further hedge, twittered their raucous joy at the beginning of summer and the new house-furnishing season. In the holes of the old branches there were scores of self-contained commodious flats to be had for the choosing. Straw by straw, tiny twig by twig, they moved in. Their clatter filled the air. A pair of blackbirds, artists, hating the life of vulgar communities, proclaimed involuntarily

their seclusion in the box-hedge itself. A thrush called his mate from a copper-beech by the house-front. A wagtail scuttled impudently over the green, in search of worms, cocking his eye this way, that way, pecking and flapping his little tail feathers in satisfaction. Far far away came the pleasant sound of a church-going bell. A pale and astonishingly near blue sky contained like a vault all the scents of spring.

Unconsciously the two on the bench had abandoned talk of minerals and of gangs. Their hands touched, maybe accidentally; but the touch lingered and grew into a clasp. The magic of the morning was common to them both. A second wagtail came with even greater impudence. Gregory's free hand pointed to them. Paula smiled and nodded.

From the entrance gap in the hedge there waddled slobbering and dignified, Barabbas, the brindled bulldog of the house. He scarcely deigned a contemptuous glance at the wagtails who shot, arrow-like, away at his vast approach. Slowly and solemnly he completed the traverse of the green and sat with lolling tongue and Satyr-like collusive eyes before the pair of humans. They called him by name. His stump of a tail responsively rubbed the grass. They snapped their fingers. Paula, knowing herself beloved, bent forward with a lavish word of endearment that made the young man's heart beat faster. Barabbas grunted his appreciation and spread himself out prone, his monstrous head on his forepaws and his cynical eyes defiantly observant. The spell of the sentimental moment was broken.

"Tell me," she said at last, "what is really the matter in Brazil? That's to say, if you can, without breach of confidence."

He passed a hand over a worried brow.

"I don't think there's anything very confidential—the gang seem to have got hold of it—— It's this way. Do you remember my telling you of my first meeting with Pandolfo? How I mistook a mineralogical specimen for mispikel? And John Cummings, F.R.S., the great authority, had just made the same mistake? Well, of course, it wasn't mispikel; it was something quite different. He had spotted the difference years before in Brazil. As a matter of fact it's an ore, the only one yet discovered, containing the essential element of paulinium. That's the secret. Naturally he got a mining concession. Cargoes of the raw ore came over. The last few lots were so poor that drastic measures had to be taken. He went out himself to take them."

"I see," said Paula. "They were just exploiting him and sending over any old stuff."

"So we thought," said Gregory.

"But now——?"

"That's what's worrying my life out," replied Gregory. "If they had only been slack, you may trust him to have tightened them up like a colossal winch. In things of that sort he has no pity. But suppose—I only say suppose—for I don't really know—that the seam of this rare and utterly unknown mineral which everybody took for inferior mispikel, was already worked out, or at best coming to an end? You see what it might mean?"

"The end of paulinium."

"And the end, for a time anyhow, of Pandolfo."

Paula stared at him, with dismay dawning in her eyes, and put her hand on her heart which began to beat with foolish quickness.

"That's impossible."

"I hope so," said the young man anxiously. "But how to account for these months? He posts his letters from

all kinds of places I've never heard of. Although he never gives a hint, it looks as though he were prospecting for new mines."

"But surely," said Paula, "if that were the case, he would tell you, on this side, to go slow, instead of getting on as fast as possible."

For she knew, from previous talks with Gregory, the feverish haste in which the Staffordshire works had been completed, with Pandolfo's Napoleonic disregard of economic details, and the impetuousness with which the first flush of orders was being executed. Up to now Pandolfo, throwing thunderbolts from the Andes, had imposed his will on malcontent directors and the Levantine weasel of a secretary. The Staffordshire manager and his staff, highly paid experts, declared themselves satisfied. Though the ore was not so rich as before—a thing to be reckoned upon when manufacture passed from the laboratory to the commercial stage—yet the metal was being produced in vast quantities.

"It's a question of Faith," replied Uglow. "His is infinite."

Paula smiled. "So it will move mountains—move them to disgorge new stores of—what's the name of the ore?"

"It's only known to us by a secret formula. Commercially it's always mispikel."

Barabbas, bored by this conversation, which was not in the least what he had expected, rose, yawned, stretched himself, and trotted off, across the green, back to the house.

Uglow regarded absently the stern of the retreating dog. Then, with a sudden twist round: "He is a giant, isn't he?"

"Who, Barabbas?"

The young man's kind eyes smiled and he shook his head.

"No, Pandolfo."

"Yes," said Paula sincerely, "he's a great man."

Gregory pulled out a telegram from his note-case.

"Look at this. Came last week, from the middle of the Andes."

It ran:

"No news Polini. Make enquiries."

"Who is Polini?"

"One of his pensioners. An old man who once managed, I think, an Italian statuary shop in Soho."

"Those little casts they sell in the streets?" asked Paula.

"The firm used to, I believe—that side of the trade is apparently extinct in London. No, they supply art schools and people who have gardens and grottos. But Polini must have belonged to the old régime. He fell on evil days and Sir Victor supported him. Of course, I made enquiries and found the old chap was dead. But the important thing is that Pandolfo, not getting his usual quarterly letter of thanks—Polini, I must say, used to pile on the gratitude—gets anxious and cables. He must be up to his neck in worry. Only a great man would think of trifles like that."

Gregory's eyes glistened as he spoke of his hero. Paula again assented soberly.

"Yes, a great man." Then she put to him again the question she had asked at Rênes-les-Eaux, in a slightly different form: "Has he ever spoken to you about his boyhood?"

"Never. Why should he? He's a man who lives in the present and the future, not in the past."

"Yet your friend Polini of the plaster-cast shop must have belonged to the past."

Gregory shrugged his shoulders, with a laugh. Pandolfo's past must have been variegated beyond that of living human if all his queer array of pensioners belonged to it. There was no doubt of the young man's ingenuousness. He offered her a cigarette which she declined and lit one himself.

"It's by tiny things that you gauge the greatness of great men," said he. "The infallible test."

She smiled acquiescence and leaned back on the seat. Her heart softened towards the great man imposing himself like a Titan both on the forces of Nature and the wavering faith of mankind, and at the same time sensitively concerned with the survivors of his obscure past. She felt a pang of remorse, somewhat akin to shame, at her own shrinking from further knowledge of those antecedents. For her alone had he lifted the curtain. What lay behind it was of no concern to others. To her his scornful honesty had proclaimed its significance. The Polini pension showed his loyalty to those hidden and obscure beginnings. At a word from her, he would have made them all clear, in his great child-like way, and unconsciously revealed himself as the man that he really was. She had a half crazy impulse to get up then and there and send him a cable, bidding him return to a chastened Paula.

She turned suddenly to Gregory.

"You're a loyal friend."

"I should be unspeakable if I weren't," he replied.

"Yes. But there's loyalty and loyalty."

His pale face flamed. "There's only one kind," said he, "for an honourable man."

There was a little silence. Then she laughed. "I think May mornings are a mistake, don't you?"

His reply was cut short by the entry, through the gap, of a man-servant carrying a box of bowls, followed by Lord Demeter and two other men. It was Demeter's one golden hour during his wife's week-end lion parties. On the bowling green, all men and lions were equal. No one could roar at the tense moment of balance of bowl in hand and sight strained on the jack. And he himself, an expert, could beat any of them. For the rest of the time he faded away impersonally into backgrounds and corners; but here he lived a life gloriously though transiently individual. His summons rang across the green.

"Paula, you'll play with me. We'll show these people who fancy themselves what we can do."

Gregory sat for a while and watched the game. Of Paula and Lord Demeter's opponents, one was a paunchy, lard-faced practitioner of psycho-analysis, the other, young Osric Dane, the actor, who had created the Modern Theatre at Peckham Rye, to which all London was crowding, in order to see the Jazz morbidity of its soul and the Freudian awakenings of its brain, symbolically translated before their eyes. Gregory had not caught the American's name. It had sounded something like Hunkbuster. But he had been caught between the pair, the night before, and had suffered the tortures of outraged common sense. Yet now, engaged in the old-world, courtly game, they laughed and advised and cheered and condoled like any other simple mortals.

He sat staring at them, bending forward, his chin on his hands, and was not aware of the approach of Paula changing ends, until she spoke.

"Well—what are you thinking of?"

"The difference," said he, "between people when they're clean and when they're dirty."

"The May morning," laughed Paula, and passed on.

Presently he rose, with a sigh, gathered his papers together and went into the house. There was an hour's work to be done before lunch. He went up to his room, sweet smelling, all bright chintz and oak, with small paned latticed windows looking over an orchard, and spread the marked typed pages before him on the delicately furnished writing table. But his mind wandered, as the love-filled mind of a young man must wander when the touch of the lady of his dreams has merged into the warm clasp of hands, when she has definitely challenged his love for her—"there is loyalty and loyalty," she had said—and when in the flash of the three words she has responded to his thought.

And yet, the same young man thumped the table with sudden anger.

"Why the devil doesn't she?"

Why the devil didn't the goddess accept the unhappy god for whom she was created; and—incidentally—put a poor wretched tantalized mortal out of his misery, once and for all?

The summons for lunch found him with work not begun. He must buckle to in the afternoon, when he had hoped for holiday. After lunch, in the drawing-room, he managed to draw her aside from a knot of people.

"I'm writing to Sir Victor, to catch the afternoon post. Can I send him a message?"

Here was the devotee ready to cast himself down beneath the Juggernaut wheels; the splendid would-be martyr posing as the well-conducted young man of good

society. She noticed just a tiny quiver of his lips. She laid a hand on his wrist. Should she desire to summon Pandolfo, a few words scribbled on a bit of paper and sent by a servant to the telegraph office would be sufficient. To summon him through an agonized lover were grotesque. Her clasp grew firmer.

"I don't send messages to people, even to super-people, who have taken no apparent notice of my existence for five months."

"I feel I must tell him that I have seen you."

"As you like," she said. "You may tell him that I am in resplendent health, prosperous and enjoying myself prodigiously."

He went away, not knowing whether he was sorrowful, or otherwise.

Paula, as soon as she could escape from the psychoanalyst, whose name, like Gregory, she had not caught, but whom, following Gregory's conjectural nomenclature, she identified in her mind as Hunkbuster, and who had penned her into a corner while he described the complex of a patient, developed just like a flower before his eyes, through recorded dreams by which it was evident that he had conceived a guilty passion for his grandmother before he was born. Paula, as soon as she could escape from the lard-faced, and somewhat pornological charlatan, rushed to her room, and almost mechanically carried out the checked impulse of the morning. She rang a bell. A maid appeared. She waved the telegraph form.

"Please ask somebody to take that at once."

The maid retired. The thing was done. She stood in front of the pier-glass and threw herself instinctively into a superb attitude. She turned away, with a majestic snap of the fingers. Hang it all! He had been right all the time. They were both big people. To the

devil with her silly snobbery! One didn't find a giant to mate with every day in the week.

Well, the die was cast, she had turned her boats, she had compromised herself according to any metaphor or figure of speech one could think of.

Gregory? He was but a boy. A bunch of sensitive nerves. He would get over it. He would yield to the inevitable.

She went to the dressing-table and did foolish things with powder puffs and went downstairs.

It was no longer possible to sit out of doors. Clouds had settled on the afternoon and a damp cold wind sang the dirge of the May morning. Great fires burned in the drawing-room where the house-party played bridge and Mah-jongg and chatted in corners.

Spencer Babington loomed tall and spectral-like before her as she entered and came to greet her. It was not the first time she had met him since her unceremonious breach of their engagement. He bore no malice. The centripetal forces of his egotism forbade it. His attitude towards her was one of wonder at her obtuseness, and of pity for her incomprehensible flinging away of fortune. Well, she had done the same, though not quite so outrageously, many times before. It was only a question of degree. He still had an open heart, open mind, open soul. He fingered the black-ribboned eyeglass in the old way and stood lean and distinguished, the statue of fidelity. He spoke gravely of his trip round the world, mainly in terms of hotels. Occasionally he elucidated an obscure political situation. His outlook struck Paula as being that of the polite eighteenth-century travellers, Mr. Addison for instance, who writing about Venice after his first visit, finds the Arsenal the only building worth mentioning. And yet, in his limited way,

Spencer was a connoisseur of pictures. She wondered whether he really liked them or whether his interest in them was that of the philatelist in his postage stamps. He seemed drier than ever, more remote than ever from the sphere of sensations in which she knew that she must truly live. Of course, she had treated him abominably; her sole excuse was that she had been afflicted with midsummer madness. But what a providential return to sanity!

They sat together, again, late in the evening in the great hall. He had conducted her thither, portentiously, saying that he had something of importance to tell her. He informed her that he was going to Geneva on a special mission, as Government expert.

"Well?" she asked.

"I shall have a hand in moulding the destinies of Europe. I hold the threads of a very curious political situation. I thought you might be interested in what is known to very few people."

"I am, indeed," she said.

She breathed a sigh of relief. For a few moments she had been oppressed by the dismaying thought that he was going to propose to her again. Now she could scarcely repress an impulse of almost hysterical laughter. Had he done so, the grotesque inverse of her last words to Pandolfo at Rênes-les-Eaux would have been inevitable. She was spared the agonizing Comic.

Before going to bed, Clara, as was her custom, came into her room to discuss the house-party and the day's doings. After a while Paula said suddenly:

"I've been very good. I've cabled to-day to Pandolfo to tell him I'll marry him."

"You dear!" cried Clara, and clasped her to her bosom.

The good lady went to sleep happy. She had been

right after all. The dignified attitude which she had counselled had been successful. She knew that Paula would come round.

The next morning Paula stood, dressed for the journey townwards by the entrance door, Lord Demeter and Clara hospitably speeding her. Pandolfo's car waited a few yards away for Gregory Uglow who was to motor her back to town. She had a luncheon engagement and would join the Demeters later in the afternoon. They talked for a while. But where was Gregory?

A man servant came up, begged pardon, but Mr. Uglow asked Madam to excuse him as he had just been called to the telephone.

Presently Gregory appeared with a very white face, holding a sheet of scribbling paper in his hand.

"Mrs. Field——"

He summoned. With a word of apology to her hosts she followed him into the vestibule.

"It's a Marconigram, opened in Tite Street and telephoned through. What's the meaning of it?"

He handed her the paper.

"On way home. Just married. Wife accompanying me. Make every kind of preparation. Pandolfo."

Without a word she took the paper out to Lady Demeter. She read it and cried:

"Why the man must have gone mad!"

Then she drew a short gasping breath, remembering, for the first time, that she had advised him to make love to another woman.

CHAPTER XVI

THERE was the fact stark in its nakedness; yet inconceivable in its fantasticality.

"The man," cried Clara Demeter, "must have gone mad."

Lord Demeter, by way of comfort and of contributing a prop to the conversation, murmured:

"Quem vult perdere Deus prius dementat."

To Gregory Uglow the hackneyed mis-quotation had its sinister application. The god dooming Pandolfo to the ruin he saw impending, had, out of celestial beneficence, afflicted him with softening of the brain.

Paula flamed. Her cable had gone. It would be repeated to London where he would find it on his arrival unless Gregory, on the watch, could purloin and suppress it. From this her dignity revolted.

To discuss the position with the Demeters was indecent.

"If we don't start, I shall be late for my luncheon party," she said to Gregory.

It was all very well to call Pandolfo mad and to drag Providence, beneficent or otherwise, into the matter; it was all very well for Paula to burn, as a divine lady did before her, at the insult to her spurned beauty; but there was the blind human nature of the man to be reckoned with. As Demeter said, after she had driven off: You couldn't expect the fellow to hang around for ever. He wasn't a dry stick like Spencer Babington. If Paula had got left, she had sat up and begged for it. She couldn't tell a chap to go to blazes and, when he went there, con-

sider herself hardly done by. His summing up of the situation, although inelegant—he belonged to a school in which elegance of diction was regarded as pedantic and suspect of insincerity—and also perhaps superficial, had so much in it of common sense, that his wife could respond only by impotent lamentation.

"The chapter is torn out and destroyed," said Paula, that evening. "Let us say no more about it."

She drew herself morally up, as proud as anything. Let him receive the cable. He could make of it what he liked. In the meantime, she was free once more; freed, too, of the year's obsession. As soon as her tenants moved out of the flat in Hansel Mansions, she could pack up the dreadful Perseus and send it away. Old Simkin, at Chadford, would love to put it up in his kitchen-garden. She thanked Heaven that the embarrassing car had been broken to bits. The engraved paulinium paper-knife with the old Florentine haft which she carried about with her, she threw into the bottom of a trunk. It was all ended, over and done with. She assured herself that she regarded the unknown personality of Lady Pandolfo with cold indifference. All she asked from a courteous world was the effacement of Pandolfo from her horizon.

Yet this must be denied her. There was Gregory Uglow. She could not visit the sins of the master upon the secretary.

Some days afterwards he rang up and craved an appointment. He came, with an envelope.

"If I've been indiscreet, do forgive me. . . . It's my duty to open cables. When I saw what it was, I thought perhaps. . . ."

She flushed with sudden shame. It had not occurred to her that confidential secretaries, in the ordinary course of business, opened telegrams. All her scorn had gone

for nothing. He stood, just ever so little twisted, recalling her first impression of him at Rênes-les-Eaux, and regarded her out of his mild brown eyes, like a dog not knowing whether his good intentions were to be accounted to him as a fault. She tore the telegram into tiny pieces, which she threw into the waste-paper basket.

"I don't see, in the circumstances, how you could have kept it for him."

"Neither did I," he said eagerly. "Then I did right?"

She nodded slowly. "Quite right." She handed him a silver box of cigarettes and took one herself. "Perhaps it was a bit your fault," she smiled, carrying it off loftily. "You don't know how you harrowed me last Sunday morning. I felt I must do something. Thank goodness, however, it wasn't necessary."

"I wish I knew what to think of it all," sighed Gregory.

"If you mean by 'all,' anything between Sir Victor and myself, you need never think of it again for the rest of your life."

"In one way," said he, "that would be a relief."

"Only in one way?" she asked, with her head aside, as she knocked the ash of her cigarette into a tray.

"I can't conceive it possible for Pandolfo, no matter whom he has married, not to need you."

"I may be old-fashioned and monogamic, my dear Gregory," she laughed, "but, when a man has got a wife, I don't hold with his needing another woman."

He fidgeted about. His cigarette had gone out and he threw it aside.

"I don't know whether I've a right to ask you, but——"

"You can ask me anything you like."

"Are you going to turn him down when he comes home?"

"I think," replied Paula, coldly, "that as far as I'm concerned, he'll turn himself down."

Gregory rose, made two or three indeterminate paces about the room, and suddenly halted with a gesture of arms.

"And if he does, what about me?"

"How—about you?"

"I'm tied to him by every sacred bond between one man and another. No matter what he did, I'd give up my life for him. And at the same time I can't do without you. I know I'm a damned fool, but I can't. I can't."

He stood away from her, as though he had burned boats, crossed Rubicons and awaited annihilation on a hostile shore. A note in his voice unlocked within her an unsuspected fount of tenderness.

"I don't see why you should do without me, if you want me so."

He swerved sharply. "You know what I mean?"

"I have a certain amount of intelligence."

"And you don't mind my meaning it?"

"Why should I?" she asked.

The universe burst into a sudden blaze of glory. Such pyrotechnics have been as common as moonshine since the beginning of the world; yet every man, from the beginning of the world, has considered them phenomena produced for his especial benefit. Gregory stood dazed. When at last he spoke there was awe in his voice.

"You are too wonderful."

She rose and went up to him. "Don't misunderstand me, my dear Gregory. I'm not a bit wonderful. I'm only very selfish. I love people to be fond of me; overfondness sometimes is embarrassing."

"Only the demonstration of it," he said quickly.

"Yes. The over-demonstration."

"If you'll let me be over-fond of you, I'll be very discreet."

She laughed happily. "We'll leave it at that, then."

The young man went away more than content, leaving a lady unable to decide whether she ought to feel exhilarated or conscience-stricken. Of course she could have said in the kindest and most charming way in the world: "My dear boy, I like you tremendously, and we'll be the best of friends till the end of time; but you must put all that other foolishness out of your head; it's utterly hopeless." Yet was it so hopeless after all? She did not know. He had stirred depths. She must wait until those stirrings rose to a conscious surface. In a vague way she felt as though, for the first time in her beautiful woman's relation with men, she had come in contact with a soul, which something within her, a soul—for lack of more precise term—was eager to greet. There was a spirituality investing the proclaimed devout lover which she recognized with astonished reverence. Geoffrey she had loved in a harum-scarum, all-in-all fashion. In the absorbing wonder and joy of her episodic marriage she had no time to worry about analysis of sentiment. It had been beautiful, primitive and complete. That was over. Such rapture, when there is no scale of values, can come but once in a life. Now she had a scale of values. . . .

She went up to her bedroom so as to be assured of privacy and took stock of herself. The past year had been disconcerting. There had been three men. Spencer Babington she dismissed with her usual twinge of conscience. He had been but a frail shelter from a thunderstorm. Pandolfo. She went over the whole indignant business again. He had proclaimed her, until she was deafened, the One and Only, the Big Woman, the Predestined Mate, the everything female you could think of

in Capital Letters; he had trumpeted her, man of infallible prognostic and unconquerable will, as his Bride-to-Be. And—she almost tore her hair—she had ended by believing it. And now he had gone and married God knew what kind of a woman. Well, he, like Spencer, was put aside. Now came Gregory.

He came offering her something indefinable, precious; something of worship of which she was not worthy; something that swept the whole range of values from the bodily to the spiritual; something that she had not thought of seeking from Geoffrey; something that, required of Spencer Babington, tall, lean, dry, fingering his black-ribboned eyeglass, was as grotesque and incongruous as a connoisseurship of wine required of a camel; something that was lacking in the vast vehemence of Pandolfo.

And he was infinite miles apart from the intellectually handsome young man, half-poet, half-charlatan, often encountered in her way through the world, who stood on his half-achievement, and, implicitly, invited her to mount with him to higher planes of thought and æsthetics. Beyond inevitable betrayals of a cultivated mind, he was the simplest gentleman in the world. . . . The word stuck in her head. . . . There he was, the sensitive, quivery, spiritual product of gentlefolk for untold generations. On the one side, fine old East Anglian stock; on the other, the bewildering descent to Pictish kings To a woman of proud ancestry, such a matter thrown into a scale is of intense significance.

And why had she gone on calling him and thinking of him as a boy? He was her senior by four years.

At last she rose from her chair and threw out her arms.

"I give it up," she said, and went down to the drawing-room where Clara and Demeter and a couple of cronies were playing bridge.

The London season began to redeem its promise of gaiety. Paula, caught up in the whirl, had little time for thought. Countless friends welcomed her as one re-arisen if not from the dead, at least from unaccountable hibernation. A score of houses were at her disposal when her month's visit to the Demeters should be over. Clara was for keeping her indefinitely; but yielded to argument. Perhaps she would join them somewhere in the summer. The first of June saw her at the Denhams, he a Conservative Member of Parliament with the curious socio-political glaze that spreads over the hardened old Parliamentarian; she, young, sprightly, enamoured of the social game. Denham, as a matter of fact, was a far-distant cousin. As far as the difference in her life went, the change was little more than a moving from one hotel to another in a crowded Riviera resort. Once more her name and photograph appeared every week in the illustrated papers. "The beautiful Mrs. Field" . . . The mother of a débutante, Sylvia Flemming, having broken a leg in a motor accident, she stood deputy and presented the child at Court. Everything that London could give her was hers for the taking—as it had been in the past. They were blind and lovely weeks.

Now and then she saw Gregory. He visited her shyly. Pandolfo had come home bringing his bride with him. The lady they discussed but little. A nonchalant question: "She all right?" and a colourless answer: "Quite charming," summed up the brief discussion. Gregory smilingly announced, however, that he had worked himself to death in putting the house straight, and of course, as soon as she arrived, she had upset all the arrangements.

"What woman wouldn't?" Paula laughed, remembering the museum-like house. "There I sympathize with her."

Once she asked: "Why aren't they seen anywhere?"

Gregory didn't know. His own social life, practically non-existent until Lady Demeter and Paula had stretched out their hands to him, was still limited. The marriage had been announced. The return of Sir Victor with Lady Pandolfo to Tite Street had been officially advertised. The cards of callers were stacked high on the salver in the hall. But of what significance this was to Pandolfo he had no means of gauging. The great man was working harder than ever; often in his laboratory till the early hours of the morning. . . . It was difficult for him to judge. Now he had his own suite in the big house and dwelt apart.

Then one day she ran into Clara Demeter at Hurlingham. Clara drew her from her party who were watching a polo game and plumped her into a chair some distance away.

"My dear, I was on the point of ringing you up. I've seen him."

She reeled off her narrative. He had caught sight of her standing on the fringe of a waiting luncheon party that day, in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel, and stridden up to her.

"Why haven't you called on my wife?"

To which Lady Demeter, comfortable woman of the world:

"How was I, my dear man, to know that you had one?"

"I've published the fact in every newspaper."

"How should I have known that you did it? One doesn't believe everything one sees in newspapers."

"I thought, at least, you were my friend," said he.

"I'm a greater friend of Paula Field," said Lady Demeter.

He shrugged his shoulders and flickered his hands.

"You cast me out," said he.

"I do nothing of the kind. If you had written or telephoned or come to see me, and in any old way had said something to this effect: 'My dear Clara Demeter, I found Paula Field a hopeless proposition, and, being merely a human being with all kinds of needs and the rest of it, I've married, out of desperation, a very charming lady—will you let me bring her along, or will you come and see her,' I should have done whatever was polite—if even out of curiosity. But no. You bring over some kind of a Frenchwoman—"

"She's as English as you are," cried Pandolfo.

"That makes it all the worse," said Lady Demeter. "Anyhow you bring her over, say you're married to her, and without a word of explanation expect your friends, who thought you romantically in love with Paula Field, to crowd round and fall at the feet of the other lady whom you have delighted to honour. No, no, my friend. That sort of thing isn't done. You cast yourself out."

The kindly lady was greatly pleased with her set-down of the Great Pandolfo, for she repeated it several times to Paula, with fresh garnishings.

He had stood before her, bending on her stern hard brows and hard eyes that half frightened her. But she wasn't to be frightened or brow-beaten. When a man has behaved like an idiot and knows it, and knows that a woman knows it, then, if a woman can't take advantage of her opportunity, God help her. . . . For the moment he had nothing to say. Clara followed up her advantage.

"Do you expect Paula Field, too, to call on Lady Pandolfo?"

"I think we might leave Paula out of the question," said he.

Lady Demeter countered by saying that Paula was the very essence of this particular question.

"Then I softened a bit," said Clara. "I don't think he's very happy. He has grown older. I asked him whether his wife was there."

Paula put up her hand. "My dear, this really doesn't interest me very much, and I certainly don't want to hear about her."

"Well, she wasn't there, anyway. So you won't. He was giving a man's business lunch party. Which reminded him that he must return to his duty. So he went, without more ado."

Paula rose. She wanted to look at the polo. But Clara restrained her for a moment longer. She must tell her of the crowd she saw him with in the restaurant. Vultures and foxes and fat pink pigs. Where could the man have dug them up? There were about eight of them. She drew a picture of Pandolfo, at the head of his table, his back to the Green Park window, gesticulating, laying down the law, snarling at his guests—yes, glaring, as if he hated them, and showing his teeth—while they pointed fingers at him or waved hands, palms upwards under his nose. It was the most dreadful luncheon party she ever had seen.

The picture lingered unpleasantly in Paula's mind for a considerable time. It seemed, in view of Gregory Uglow's half confidences, the revelation of a new aspect of the man, fiercely at bay, with his back against the wall.

Then, one evening, about a fortnight afterwards, at supper at the Embassy Club, a young man, her neighbour, one of the many of her legion of vague acquaintances, pointed out a woman dancing with a clean shaven, saturnine dark man; whose eyeglass, firmly wedged in, lowered the under-eyelid so that the red showed and suggested the eye of a dangerous dog.

"Do you know who that is?"

"I know the man, of course—by sight only, thank goodness. Everyone does—Cosmo Phelps."

"Yes. Dreadful fellow. But the woman? Look now, she's turning round."

"I've seen her about, here and there," said Paula. "Rather pretty and attractive, in a common sort of way."

"That's Lady Pandolfo."

The announcement was like a sudden stab in her heart. She said rather foolishly:

"Are you sure?"

The young man laughed. "Of course. I was introduced to her here a few nights ago. Don't suppose she'll remember me. And I know Pandolfo too. You know whom I mean—Sir Victor Pandolfo?"

"Oh yes, I've met him," she replied.

"A tremendous card, isn't he? I come across him in the City. I'm a mining engineer, you know. That's how. Oh yes, that's Lady Pandolfo right enough. Not long married——"

Paula looked at the woman whom indeed she recognized as a figure seen before in public places, with a little curl of disdain at the corners of her lips. She was a woman of considerable beauty, slim, exquisitely and daringly gowned, fresh coloured, eyes and mouth animated by alluring laughter as she looked up into her partner's face. Paula remembered that, on the previous occasion, she had always seen her thus—accentuated, as it were, either in a dancing-man's arms or leaning, bare bodied, across a small restaurant table.

She said to the young man, rather coldly; "Why did you think I should be interested?"

"This is a foolish and idle place," he replied, in a tone of apology. "A new star shooting into the firmament—lots of people have asked who she is."

"And who is she, besides being Lady Pandolfo?"

"Ah!" said the young man, "the rest is . . . gossip."

"And silence, I hope."

"That's what I meant to convey," said he.

The dance over she watched the couple cross to a champagne covered table, where two more couples joined them. The two other women looked hard, seasoned, commonplace, of the predatory type which regards bridge, race-meetings and the friendship of men familiar with the turf and with Stock Exchange affairs as a definite means of adding to their incomes; outwardly respectable enough to be admitted through the doors of the exclusive club, but inwardly a charnel house of morals and human emotions. Once more disdain flickered at the corners of Paula's lips. And then she recognized one of the men as Monte Dangerfield.

She was glad when the party broke up so that she could think quietly alone.

What was Pandolfo's wife doing in that galley? Why did he allow her to belong to its dreadful crew? For dreadful crew it was, even below the breath of scandal.

There was Cosmo Phelps, a man notoriously living on his wits, a sinister figure in international society, whose name was always cropping up in the devious by-ways of petty finance, known to be behind all kinds of gambling hells, a bird of prey who by some magic managed to wear the plumage of ordinary social fowl; a man who had lived for many years on the borderland beween Society and the walls of a gaol. And with him was Monte Dangerfield, still admitted within the pale of decent folk; but a vulture as rapacious as Cosmo Phelps. Was it not to him that her foolish old father mainly owed his financial ruin? And the women!

She had a prescience of tragedy. Two pictures haunted her. Clara's: that of the snarling Pandolfo; the one she had just had before her eyes: that of the laughing, beautiful sensuous woman, manner, body, heart, soul, obviously part and parcel of the galley's crew.

For all her pity for Pandolfo, which rose above resentment and scorn of marital weakness, if such there was, she felt powerless to act. She thought of consulting Gregory. But what could he do? Tell his dynamo of an employer that his wife was making his name as mud in the eyes of social London? Pandolfo would blast him with thunderbolts. Seek Pandolfo herself? No, there were limits to woman's magnanimity. The path to Pandolfo was strewn with all manner of prides and delicacies exquisitely torturing to walk upon.

She revelled and danced through the next two or three weeks, during which she only once had a fleeting glimpse of Lady Pandolfo. It was on the lawns at Ascot, and she was talking animatedly to an elderly peer notoriously debauched. Yet on that occasion too, she saw in the distance, for an instant, Pandolfo, grey-hatted, magnificent, alone, standing with folded arms surveying the scene from the far edge of the crowd.

At the end of June she went back to Chadford.

CHAPTER XVII

It had been a trick as old as the Stone Age; as old as woman's guile than which nothing human can be older; a trick that, in spite of legendary hoariness, is sempiternally taken by man as a manifestation of the divine. It is of primordial simplicity. Given a grain of guile and it cannot fail. All the woman has to do is to work the man up to consolation point, and then—console him. This to Nesta de Bréville had been as easy as lying.

From the start she had everything in her favour. She bore an authentic title; she came of unimpeachable English stock; she had beauty and an extensive and peculiar knowledge of the world. She had as her shipboard neighbour a man whose clumsiness set him at once penitently at her feet. She had the glamour of moonlight and midnight and balmy air and a mild Atlantic ever blue. . . . When he told her of his romantic passion for another woman, she smiled, knowing that he was but a poor fool man lost and won. All that was in his heart for the obdurate lady she allowed him to pour out into her angel ears. The process of exhaustion lasted a couple of days. Pandolfo was nothing if not vast. And then, following ancient, deliberate system she began to fill him up with herself. Being a woman of few reticences save those counselled by a cold intelligence, she filled him up to the neck. The process hardly required subtlety. She needed little recourse to the man's pity for the eternally misunderstood woman, the lonely soul on the heights pining for its spiritual mate. The psychology of the mat-

ter was as crudely evident to her as to Frank Demeter. She had brains; yes, also the gift of light wit, tact, the manners of the polite world, assets redeeming her in his confused mind from the grosser appeal of the courtesan; but all said and done there she was, warm, palpitating, laughing woman ready for the taking, at her own price, by the hungry man.

He landed at Rio Janeiro her helpless, vehement slave. Sacrificing all for him, she had abandoned her visit to Buenos Aires whither she was bound, a five days' further voyage. His cable to Paula was his one desperate bid for freedom.

As soon as legal formalities allowed, he married her. He caught her up with him to the mountains. For a while even Nesta de Bréville was dazzled by the splendour of his generosity. Nothing less than a private car was good enough for her, stocked with everything to satisfy every conceivable want of woman. But in the byways of the Andes, where the mine was situated, the all-compelling conqueror was powerless before the peculiarly uncomfortable Force of Nature. Also, even he had not at his beck some djinn of the Arabian tales who could conjure up a palace, in rough mining-camps, with baths, hot and cold, and central heating and a Chinese chiropodist in attendance.

The lady kept her temper for a calculated while; then deliberately and plaintively lost it. Pandolfo took her back to Rio, established her in a hotel suite adequate to her dignity and went off again to the mountains. Lady Pandolfo led a joyous life. Pandolfo a hard one. Now and then he made the dreadful journey in order to spend a few days with her. At first her vanity was satisfied. He paraded her about the British Colony in his grandest manner. Behold the wife of Pandolfo, beautiful, exquis-

itely gowned, hung with jewels. He flung down his gauntlet. Was there such another in South America. Then suddenly he would dash off again to his mines of despair.

After a while she began to fret at the restricted social life of Rio Janeiro, and to urge his return to Europe.

"Don't you understand, I must perfect my metal?"

She bothered his old metal. She regarded it, although she did not tell him so, with vast lack of interest. It was not Pandolfo who could declare: "Unless I succeed in the mountains, I am ruined." To show her a threatening cloud of failure in his firmament would have been the beginning of the end of the Great Man.

"Things that must be, must be."

"But who says they must?"

"I say so."

"But supposing I say otherwise?" she ventured once.

"You can only do that by coming into the mountains again."

She shivered. Anything but that. She shifted her ground. He was working himself to death. He needed a change in England.

"If I'm working myself here to death," said he, "in England I'll be working myself to immortality."

She regarded him askance, as though he were a bit mad.

At last, the Board of Directors of The Paulinium Steel Company clamoured for his return. Even Gregory, badgered by Joram and Innwater, suggested it. With one of his sudden flashes he yielded. He descended post-haste into Rio and burst in upon his wife.

"We sail on Tuesday."

"Have you booked our passages?"

"Not yet."

"You won't get berths."

"I have cabins made for me," he declared.

He went out to the Royal Mail offices and came back triumphant. He had secured a suite.

"What I want I get. Will you never believe it?"

This proof of the ascendancy of his star vivified a courage that was growing desperate. On the eve of his sailing he gave a dinner-party to those who had befriended his wife during his absences. Lady Pandolfo shone almost dazedly in the reflection of the glory in which he had the strange power of investing himself.

It was on the voyage that she asked him whether he had taken any steps to announce their marriage in England.

"Steps? What steps? If Brazil knows it, Europe must know it."

"Announcements are usual," she said.

"I never thought of it. I was too busy. You and the mines. Why didn't you suggest it before? If you think it ought to be done, I'll send a Marconigram to *The Times* at once."

He started up and would have sped to the wireless office, had she not restrained his impetuosity. Time enough when they landed. There was a point which she had often wished to discuss.

"Do sit down again."

He obeyed. She made her point. Until she had married Pandolfo, she had been content to keep the name of her former husband. It was her right and the title helped a lonely woman on her path through cosmopolitan hotels. Still—by the depravity of his life the Comte de Bréville had made the name a byword of disgrace. Coming to England afresh, after many years, could she not enter society under sweeter colours? For instance, couldn't

The Times announcement run: "On the So-and-so, at So-and-so, Sir Victor Pandolfo, K.B.E., to Nesta, daughter of the late Isaac Saunderson, D.D., Canon of Ely?"

Pandolfo threw up his hands. Why, of course. Of course. He hated, loathed, and abominated the sound or suggestion of de Bréville. He wished the scandal had never been born. She drew a fluttering breath of relief.

"But why wait till now?" he asked.

She didn't know. It was a delicate matter from which she had shrunk. Besides he had always been so preoccupied. . . . She juggled herself out of the situation.

"I must send a Marconigram, in any case," said he. For it suddenly occurred to him that he was bringing a wife to a bachelor house.

Hitherto he had obeyed a life long instinct of secretiveness as to his domestic affairs. Even Paula, alone of mortals to whom he had revealed his parentage, had never heard of his Russel Square housemaid mother and the semi-detached villa at Walham Green and the motor-car and chauffeur and the funeral plumes that had impressed the Fulham Road. No one living had heard of his first wife, caught up, strange comedy of the gods, on a previous voyage from Brazil. His life, and a man's intimate life is that concerned with his women-folk, he reserved from view with an almost Oriental sense of inviolability. His taking of a woman to himself was no one's business. So worked an instinctive inhibition. Also, after the first frenzy of new husbandship had abated, he remembered his little circle of friends. He hated the eating of his words. And those having been peculiarly high-seasoned, he had no relish for the repast. He sent the friends with an angry wave, into the limbo of forgotten things. Time enough for proclamation of madness when he should return. But now the practical common-

place ordained announcement. He sent his wireless message to Gregory.

The homeward voyage lacked the Vivien enchantment of the outward one. He played the part of the Great Pandolfo. The Captain was his very honest and humble servant—had not Pandolfo saved him and ship from submarine destruction during the war? He delighted to do the great man honour, and Pandolfo accepted honour as a thrush does worms. . . . But apart from hideous anxiety, that, for all his courage, awakened him, in cold sweat, every morning, gloomy doubts and suspicions, hitherto repelled, began to assail him.

One day out, they sat alone on opposite sides of the ledge-divided writing-table in the upper smoke-room on the right of the companion-way. He was so deeply immersed in his work that only a shrill clear-pitched voice made him aware of a close presence.

"Nesta! Hallo old thing, who would have thought of seeing you here!"

He started, just in time to see a swift sign of rebuke on his wife's face and an indeterminate, effeminate, fair-moustached middle-aged Englishman, with outstretched hands, in act of greeting her. She rose quickly, mistress of the situation.

"Victor—this is an old friend of mine. Major Lethaby —my husband, Sir Victor Pandolfo." The two men bowed. "And where have you sprung from? It's years since we met."

"Pre-war," said the man with over-necessary emphasis.

Pandolfo stood hands on hips.

"Bound for Southampton?"

Lethaby laughed. "Of course. Where else?"

"We touch at Madeira, Lisbon, pleasant places. Also Cherbourg, one of the ocean gates of France."

"If you won't look on me as a Jonah," said the other, "I think I'll carry on to Southampton."

He took smiling leave, for the moment, and went his way. Nesta flashed.

"You've been rude."

"Why proclaim the obvious? I have no use for men of that sort. When I have no use for a man I tell him so."

There was a swift battle of words. Her eyes and lips hardened. An old friend—boy and girl—before the war. The silly jealousy.

"You don't propose that I should cut him for the rest of the voyage?"

"It would be best to put him through a mincing machine," he said magnificently, and settled down again to his desk.

She clenched her hands impotently, tore up the letter she was writing and throwing the fragments into the waste-paper basket, flung angrily away.

Pandolfo sat with finger tips at the roots of his crisp bronze hair, and his thoughts were miles away from the interests of The Paulinium Steel Company, Limited.

In five months things had happened; many things had happened; all of them little things, each as unimportant as an individual Liliputian arrow shot into the side of the bound Gulliver, but in their individual aggregate, more than irritating, maddening, so that he could roar with exasperation.

There had been a foolish, accidental question of money. Under misapprehension he had left her inadequately supplied. On his return to Rio she had reproached him somewhat tartly. She had been forced to borrow. His splendid remorse for carelessness swelled the cheque that

he wrote there and then. Yet, afterwards, the thought smote him: Why should she borrow when she had an ample private fortune? Not that he wished her to spend a milreis of her own, save for her good pleasure. The idea of sharing expenses in any way was repulsive to his magnificence. But on an emergency . . . She had but to present her letter of credit. . . . To discuss the matter was unthinkable. But the little puzzle remained.

Then there had been a pleasant Spanish secretary of Legation, met at the British Consul's, who when introduced to Lady Pandolfo, kissed her hand and said:

"Surely I have had the pleasure of meeting you two years ago at Monte Video?"

And she had replied: "Surely you are mistaken, Señor. I think we have met, but it was either in Madrid or Saint Sebastian. I have never been to Monte Video."

His quick ear had caught the dialogue—he stood but a pace or two away; and he remembered Pelham Foxe's gossip concerning a lady hurriedly named Madame de Tréville who had been in Monte Video, two years before.

On their way back to the hotel from the luncheon-party she had said:

"I wish to God we could get out of this place."

He asked why. She shrugged impatient shoulders.

"I hate the people. The English are provincial. The Portuguese are filthy and the Spaniards are insufferable."

"It's by no means the country of my predilection," said he, with unusual gentleness. "But it happens that all I care for in the world is bound up in it."

She sulked handsomely. "I count for nothing then."

"You are bound up in my life of ambition," said he.

"Without me, you'd carry on just the same."

He pondered for a moment, looking out at the wide,

white thoroughfare and the busy flashing trams, and turned to her.

"Whatever I may be, I am a Force and must carry on till I die."

"That's pleasant for me, isn't it?" she scoffed.

He asked: "What more can I give you?"

"A bit of my own way, now and then."

He threw out his arms: "My God, what restraint do I put on you?"

"You tie me here," she cried, seizing her opportunity. She went on. She was bored to misery. The place, the people, the climate got on her nerves.

The argument continued when they reached the hotel. In some despair he suggested that she should sail by the first available boat and wait for him in London. She rejected the proposal angrily. A stranger to England for so many years, she must return with him and take up her immediate position as his wife. She laughed, with some bravura.

"Don't you see, you must guarantee my respectability?"

As a compromise, he made another suggestion: that, during his next absence, she should take ship to Buenos Aires and stay for a while with her friends. She stared at him as though he were mad, and burst into hysterical laughter.

"You have queer ideas of honeymoons!"

He said in his eager way:

"I'll take you there myself. Leave you with your friends and when my weary business is over, I'll come for you and we'll sail home from there."

She pulled herself together.

"No, no. I'll stick it."

Then had followed the incident of Lady Pandolfo's maid, a Frenchwoman, gaunt and silent, and apparently dog-devoted. By letter he learned that his wife had summarily dismissed Victorine for insolence and general impossibility and had taken her passage on a homeward steamer. A day later he received an unsigned letter in French. It began:

"If Monsieur desires to know why Madame did not want to go to Buenos Aires . . ."

He read no further, tore the conjectured unclean thing in pieces and scattered them over the Andes.

Then, there was the disturbing faded scrap of paper; a bit of label on one of her trunks, which caught his eye as he surveyed the pile of luggage for the steamer's hold; just a dirty little right-hand bottom corner fragment bearing nothing but the letters "EO." He could think of no other place in the world thus ending save Monte Video.

Yet over and over again of her own accord, without question, from the time of their first meeting, she had definitely stated that this was her first visit to the Continent of South America.

There had been a hundred other trivial things.

And now came this common man with his insolent familiarity; an outrage on him, Pandolfo, whose wife should be not only like Cæsar's rubbishy consort, but as majestic as Juno, with the pride of Artemis and the cold inviolability of Pallas Athene thrown in. Imagine any whippersnapper about town or Monte Carlo daring to address Paula Field in such fashion!

He sat with his head in his hands, wondering what kind of woman he had married. She seemed as remote from him as the teeth-showing stars whose pale performance he had seen, in her company, on the screens of picture palaces.

On arriving in London he made a brave show. The faithful Gregory met them, was introduced with sincere and exuberant flourish.

"My second self, of whom I have so often spoken. He would call himself I know, my *fidus Achates*. But that's his modesty. Fidus Achates never seemed to do a hand's turn for Æneas. He was a bit of an ass. But Gregory," he clasped and shook his shoulders, "is a great man. You must be the best of friends."

"I'm sure we shall," said Lady Pandolfo.

And each looked into the other's eyes and felt perfectly and coldly sure that they would not.

When they entered the house which Gregory, trusting to loving earnestness and foresight rather than to experience, had transformed from the cold museum into something resembling a home, with bright curtains and cushions and such-like hasty decorations—a young lady decorator, lioness-cub met at Hinsted, had guided him—Pandolfo made great gestures of enthusiasm.

"Another place, my dear boy, another place altogether. What's the artist's crown—laurel, bay, parsley? I can't remember. Anyhow, you deserve a golden crown. And all done in a fortnight! Marvellous! . . . Ah, your boudoir——" this on the tour of the house. "Here I hope you'll be happy. A touch of genius, my boy, putting the Old Crome there. Falls in with the chintz. What do you think, Nesta?"

"It's very well thought out," she replied, with a certain sweet acidity, "but unfortunately chintz and I are old enemies."

"If I could have had but a hint, Lady Pandolfo . . ." said Gregory somewhat downcast, and sensitively conscious of her previous lip service to Pandolfo's exuberant proclamations.

"Of course, Mr. Uglow, you have done wonders. But how should you know?" she turned to Pandolfo. "I see this room all rich purples and gold. A divan here, instead of that stiff Chippendale. You understand, Victor?"

"As you wish," he replied. "Purple and gold, like the gleaming cohorts of the Assyrian. But I don't see our dear mellow English Old Crome in the setting."

"You can stick that anywhere. There's heaps of room for it in the house."

She made triumphant and iconoclastic progress. In many instances the Lady of the House had unquestionable right on her side. Hers was the province, the power, and the expression of her glory. But there are ways and ways of asserting sovereignty.

When they were alone, she said to Pandolfo.

"I think your young man is a *fidus* what-you-call-it, after all."

The instinctive mutual hostility grew fast. She put immediate ban on Gregory's intimate domestic relations. A paid secretary, he must live apart. He acquiesced gently.

"Sorry, my dear fellow," said Pandolfo, "but women have their own ideas about running houses."

Gregory smiled. "If they hadn't, I don't see how houses could be run."

Pandolfo said: "At any rate there'll be more freedom for you."

He proclaimed his marriage far and wide. In his large way he gave her the credit of all the Vanity Houses in London. She arrayed herself in gold and silver dreams. He had married her: she should have her heart's desire.

Then came the sudden and bewildering shock.

His friends, where were they? she asked.

Where was the social life on which she counted? The stuffy people who had called and asked them to dismal dinners, who were they? Did he know nobody amusing?

These questions hit him like blows of a sledge-hammer. He realized, for the first time, that in her sense of the word he had no social life. The intensity of his work had allowed few moments for the cultivation of the frivolous. For the relaxation of getting at intimate grips with things, he had ever sought the companionship of men. Of the society that dances, races, shows itself here, and there, and everywhere before the journalistic camera, he only touched the fringe. Few years, as yet, had passed since he had paraded with his K.B.E. ribbon round his neck among the Great Ones of the Empire; apart from Lady Demeter and her circle his acquaintance was sporadic. To create a fresh nucleus he had not the time or the opportunity; least of all such a nucleus as she demanded.

And he stood on the brink of the ever-widening gulf between them, and scarcely perceived it, for all his thoughts were concentrated on the agonizing problem: how to make Paulinium bricks without straw from the Andes.

CHAPTER XVIII

Paula spent July and part of August at Chadford Park where Mr. Veresy, with his florid face and his white crisp hair parted carefully down the middle, continued to exhibit the fine old English gentleman facing ruin with distinction, and Myrtilla, the English gentlewoman doing her duty in trying circumstances. Life was not gay, but it was easy. Pargiter had a new dress-coat. The ostentatious frayed sleeve had eventually so affected Mr. Veresy's nerves that he had told the faithful retainer to burn the damned thing and not reappear before him until he was decently dressed. Whereupon Pargiter, it seemed, had forthwith presented himself in an immaculate garment which, presumably, he had been saving up for better days. Paula surrendered to the gentle summer sadness of the place, its pitiful shabbiness, its unweeded and untended grounds, its vast expanse of empty and dilapidated glass-houses—for what could old Simkin, unaided, do more than tend the lawn and flower-beds in front of the house and the kitchen-garden and his rheumatism, and nurse an ailing old wife and his own manifold personal grievances?—its defiant bravery of secular oak, elm, and chestnut, its ragged orchard heavy with promise, where, as a spindle-shanked child she would sit, precariously on a forked branch, reading Stevenson or Swinburne (new discovery!) and munching at a green apple; its weather-worn stones peeping through neglected ivy, beckoning to her familiarly and, on her approach, whispering in her ear the secret history of an ancient race.

Time passed evenly. She wrote her articles, mothered

the germ of a new novel and, with her father and sister, accepted such mild social invitations as their reduced means enabled them to return in kind. Late August and September she spent with friends in Scotland. October saw her back at Chadford. The previous year seemed to repeat itself. From Pandolfo never a word. Clara Demeter gave her the gossip of the leonine world, from which the Great Lion had disappeared. Spencer Babington wrote primly. Gregory Uglow sighed discreetly in a weekly letter, but of Pandolfo and Paulinium, Ltd., gave the scantiest news.

In the late autumn the novel was published. Reviewers praised it; kind friends boomed it; on its own merits of charm, freshness, and wisdom, it commanded the attention of the novel reading public. If she did not wake up one morning to find herself famous, her publishers' reports assured her of agreeable success. Fanshawe, one of the "best-seller" novelists and a friend of hers, wrote enthusiastically and insisted on her meeting him in London, so that he could carry her off to his agents and place her affairs in their hands. She returned with the thrill of having definitely sloughed the skin of the amateur and taken up her position as a professional novelist. With the ardour of the neophyte and the woman, she plunged deep into her work.

It was not until February that, needing a change and finding financial sanction, she took up her life again in the Hansel Mansions flat just vacated by her American tenants. There, for the first time since the beginning of her hibernation, she had to lend ear to ugly rumours concerning the Pandolfos. They came from all sides. Lady Demeter proclaimed the impossibility of the lady. Spencer Babington gave her to understand that Pandolfo was selling his pictures. He himself had bought the

Andrea Vaccaro, the subject of their first mutual understanding.

"He offered it to me," said Spencer, "straight off, like a Jew pedlar with watches to sell. Ran across him at the St. James's Club, where he was dining with the secretary of the Brazilian Legation. He came up to me and without any how-d'ye-do or preliminary conversation, blurted out in his volcanic way, so that all the room could hear—you know, my dear Paula, how unnecessary eruptions get on my nerves—'My dear fellow, you're the very man I want to see, though I didn't know it till I saw you.'"

Paula interrupted with a laugh. "He's honest at any rate."

"Yes—yes," said Spencer, fingering his eyeglass with the faintest air of testiness, "I quite grant it. But, if you'll forgive my saying so, you're spoiling my story. He comes up to me, just like that—and, right away—'I've been offered two thousand guineas for my Vaccaro. I know you want it. I'll give you an option on it for that price till twelve o'clock to-morrow.' Then he waved his hand and followed his host out of the dining-room."

"Did you buy the picture?" asked Paula.

"I did. In all modesty I may call myself an expert in post-Raphael paintings, what an older generation would term a connoisseur. I could name two or three American collectors who would pay three thousand guineas at least for that Vaccaro. It is unique. Not that I contemplate selling it," he added hastily, lest Paula should suspect him of mean commercialism. "I only mention the fact to show you that I know what I'm talking about. Besides, I have always hankered after the picture."

"Why, do you think, did he want to sell it?"

He made the tiniest hint of a shrug, that of the British

diplomatist priding himself on his outward absorption into cosmopolitan manners, one hand always holding the black-ribboned eyeglass.

"Why do you sell your novels?"

The plural sounded agreeably in the ears of the new-fledged professional.

"I don't sell them. They remain my property. I get a royalty on the publishers' sales. My literary income is payment for work done. Why do you sit in a horrid room at the Foreign Office all day long?"

"To serve my country," replied Spencer Babington. "My salary is risible. Let us call it half a picture per annum."

Paula laughed and handed him the cigarette box. The same old pragmatical Spencer. Had he but a vestige of a wing-feather, she would have married him a year ago.

"Perhaps my analogy was a false one," he admitted. "But take a hypothetical case. Suppose you went into a jeweller's with a string of pearls you are wearing and sold them, what would be your motive? To get money. That can be Pandolfo's only motive for selling a much-prized and valuable picture." He paused for a rhetorical instant. "The man's devilish hard up."

A queer little stab in the heart made her wince. The possible failure of Paulinium steel had been a subject for gentle regret ever since that May morning the year before when Gregory had made her the confidant of his anxieties. Pandolfo's amazing marriage and his withdrawal from her horizon together with her absorption in her own work had blunted the regret's poignancy. Men of vast affairs often failed in their ambitions. Had he but demanded or allowed it, she would have given him her spiritual sympathy. The financial aspect of this she had never envisaged. He was a man, apparently of vast

wealth, careless of expenditure; an exotic prince, commanding inexhaustible resources in—say—Samarcand, or whatever romantic El Dorado you pleased. For he lived *en prince,* he acted *en prince,* with boundless generosity. In a vague way she had known that the failure of Paulinium would mean some monetary loss. Yet what could that matter compared with the collapse of his card-castle of dreams? His material life would remain unaffected. But now, Spencer's crude statement had revolutionized her conceptions. The man was devilish hard up. So was her father. Her father had sold his pictures. Pandolfo was selling his, needing money for the ordinary carrying on of life. It seemed fantastic, incredible. She tried to picture Pandolfo shabbily dressed, hesitating whether he should walk or incur the expense of a taxi, averting his head from an outstretched hand conscious of no largesse wherewith to fill it. Her fancy boggled at the task. He could not be other than the Grand Panjandrum, self-created such, she was sure, since his childhood when he was associated with his father in hawking plaster of Paris images through the streets.

"Apart from the fact that he sold you a picture, how do you know that he's hard up?" she asked.

"He sold a charming little Caravaggio to Duheimer the other day."

"Perhaps Lady Pandolfo doesn't like late Italian masters and prefers to fill her rooms with Messrs. Piccasso & Co."

"She likes to fill all that is observable by her person, the display of which, my dear Paula, constitutes her sole lavishness, with pearls and diamonds."

"It comes to the same thing," said Paula, somewhat relieved. If a man chose to exchange a couple of works of art for a wretched string of pearls to help cover the

semi-nudity of his wife, it was his own affair. The transaction did not connote the road to beggary. "I'm afraid, Spencer, you're developing a tendency to gossip," she said.

"On the contrary," he replied, "I'm developing the diplomatic faculty of observing the tendency of straws quivering in the wind."

The inevitable encounter took place on a grey March morning in Sloane Street. Pandolfo was rushing from a shop, across pavement to car, when walking down sedately she found herself in direct apposition. Only by a swerve in his imperious course did he avoid jostling her. He raised his hat, as to a strange woman, and began:—

"I'm so sorry." Then: "You, Paula, of all people!"

"Why shouldn't I walk down Sloane Street, seeing that I live within a stone's throw of it?"

"Always the same," said he.

"I hope so. And you?"

He took her by the arm and by some trick of force had swept her past the door held open by the chauffeur into the car, before she could realize what had happened. She started indignantly from the seat on which she was almost flung and broke into angry protest. The chauffeur slammed the door.

"Let me get out——"

"A scandal in Sloane Street? My dear, is it thinkable? Where can I have the pleasure of driving you?"

"To the end of the street, so as to avoid the scandal you seem to be afraid of," said Paula.

"I'll drive you where I like," he flashed, "and show you that I, too, am always the same. You're back in your flat?"

She nodded. "We'll go there." He flung the address

to the chauffeur through the open window and the car moved on.

"Do you realize I haven't seen you for nearly eighteen months?" he asked.

"That's scarcely my fault," she retorted.

"I don't care whose fault it is, at any rate, it's my accursed misfortune."

"In the circumstances, is that quite a loyal thing to say?"

"In the circumstances, yes. I've been God's greatest fool."

She met his eyes coolly, in spite of the odd little thrill, half of amusement, half of a kind of elemental fright, at thus being forcibly abducted. So had he imposed his will on her many times before, putting her into an absurd position from which she could not retire with dignity.

"What kind of answer do you want me to make?"

He shot out his hands. "A generous one at any rate."

She felt at a loss for reply. Obviously the transcendent folly of which he accused himself was that of mating with a lady who wasted his substance in riotous living with Monte Dangerfield and his crew. Hitherto she had been very sorry for him; but her sorrow was tempered by a woman's humiliated resentment. Had she not cabled the gift of herself to him one emotional afternoon last year, only to be hit in the face the next morning by the news of his marriage? She had assured herself that he had put himself out of her life for ever, that the fact gave her the greatest possible relief, that, had the cable reached a celibate Pandolfo, the personality which she proudly realized as Paula Field would have been inchoate and unrecognizable. Interest in him she maintained; in the deliberately unplumbed profundities of her being. That he compelled. She felt it now, as he looked at her.

Should she never see him again and live till ninety, he would always remain as the one magnetic figure in her life, equal in attraction and repulsion, never to be forgotten or put aside, ever to be vividly and somewhat terrifyingly remembered.

She turned her head aside, shrinking from an unfamiliar hunger in his eyes. Outwardly he wore his usual air of the conqueror. Far from the shabbiness pictured from Spencer Babington's gossip, his sleek attire proclaimed not only vulgar ease but the daily thought of the prosperous man careful of his personal appearance. She noted the continued dandyish affectation of the low-cut collar. Then there was the car, even more luxurious and more softly rolling than the one in which, paralyzing her volition, he had carried her off to Ranelagh. He was the same Pandolfo, master of the earth, vehement, imperious —and yet there was a difference. His full face had grown thin; there was greying hair at his temples; his nose seemed to be absurdly pinched; and the faintest little bloodshot striations marred the serenity of his clear and commanding eyes. She looked idly aside, conscious of subtle change. Then she darted a swift glance and, meeting his, shivered from a sudden grotesque impression. Had the lion turned into wolf?

The car drew up before the front steps of Hansel Mansions. From the spot whence he had abducted her to the flat, it was a matter almost of seconds. The chauffeur opened the car-door. Pandolfo leaped out and aided her to descend. She turned with a smile, socially gracious, and waved a valedictory hand.

"Thanks for driving me home, Sir Victor."

She marched into the hall of the Mansions. The liftman stood by the gates and touched his cap as she entered; but Pandolfo was at her heels.

"I'm afraid——" she began.

He interrupted. "No matter. You needn't stand on ceremony with me." And then pleasantly to the man: "Still here?"

The attendant grinned his appreciation of recognition. "For the last twenty years, Sir Victor."

Again what could woman do? To bid him begone would only arouse undesirable astonishment in the mind of the lift-man on whom Pandolfo, a couple of years ago, had taken care to impress his personality.

In her drawing-room she faced him.

"Well, you're here. Once more you've taken me at a disadvantage. Whether it's chivalrous or decent of you, I leave you to judge. I can't see what we've got to say to each other that could be of any possible use. You've chosen to go your way; I've gone mine."

"The pity of it," said he.

Visible through the open communicating door of the dining-room the Perseus gleamed in its corner. His quick eye caught it, and he stretched out a hand.

"I'm glad you kept that. It may be my masterpiece."

She made vague answer, asking herself the while what he was doing there, disturbing her, as she hated to be disturbed, by his presence, his air of authority and possession.

"I have every wrong on my side, I admit," he said suddenly. "But we can't get away from each other. I've been wondering how, in this conventional world in which you live, I could approach you. I'm aware that there's the government system of Posts, Telegraphs and Telephones. I could also have rung at your door. But, as I say, you live in the polite world."

"I never thought it could be such an impregnable fortress," she replied ironically.

"Fortress?" He snapped his fingers. "In reality, you never thought me capable of any delicacy of feeling. You've never regarded me as a man capable of self-restraint. My God! If you only knew!"

He walked a pace or two and returned.

"Anyhow, fate has taken things out of our hands. We've met. And now comes the question I've been trying to solve for the last year. Why would you have none of me?"

She suddenly felt incomprehensibly and ludicrously angry. She could not tell him that in the space of less than twenty-four hours, she had offered herself to him and that he had summarily rejected her, declining on a hatefully lower range of passions and the etceteras of the poet. The picture of the common woman and her common crew flashed before her vision. She said:

"What's the good of going over the old ground over and over again? Everything's ended now. You did it. I didn't. You're married. There's nothing more to be said."

He sat on the head of the sofa and rested his arm on the back. "There's everything in the world to be said. You put me away from you. I'm not a congenital celibate. Another woman passed by. Need I dot i's and cross t's?"

She turned flaming. "You've no right to talk like that. You married, with your eyes open. It's up to you to make the best of it. I'll speak frankly. I've seen Lady Pandolfo—in an atmosphere that, I know, isn't yours. I'm in the same atmosphere myself, sometimes. Doubtless she wants things which your egoism won't give her, can't give her. You're the big man, handling great affairs, absorbed in your ideals which are your work, interested in the outside relaxations of art, literature,

philosophic talk, the refinements of the connoisseur of life, the poetry of wine, for instance. Your whole existence is a conglomeration of intellectual and artistic sensations. You love power. You have the mania of giving. But you must give in your own way, according to your own bountiful ideas of what is good for your—what's the law term?—your beneficiary to receive. Don't I know from my own experience? Well—apart from things you've wanted to give me—what about the little nurse at Rênes-les-Eaux whom you tried to fit out in Paris gowns and send to Biarritz? Don't I know? All to the greater glory of the Great Pandolfo. And because you give, you expect us all to bow down and worship you. I'm not talking of women only, but of men as well. I give you the credit of not being the *homme à femmes*. In your real life sex is only an accident. You've got Gregory body and soul, just as you've tried to get me body and soul. No, no, my dear man. Don't misunderstand me. I pay you the tremendous compliment of believing that nothing is more repugnant to your mode of thought than being the Lord of the Harem. Women may matter to you sexually—why not?—I'm a woman of thirty who knows the world—but they must matter to you intellectually, morally and spiritually. For you to be happy with them, you must meet them on this higher plane. They must bow down not like Odalisques before a Grand Bashaw, but like Neophytes before the Master. You give, but they must subordinate themselves to your great conception of yourself. They must merge themselves in the Great Pandolfo. You tried it on me. Oh, of course unconsciously; you're too intense an egoist to be insincere. You pose instinctively, but you're the last man in the world one would dream of calling a *poseur*. No, no, listen to me my friend——" In the flood of her

speech she checked whatever reply he would have made, and stood over him slipped from arm to seat of sofa, and for the first time in their queer relations commanded him to silence. "Listen to me. It's good for you, and good for me, that I should say all that's in my heart. I may never be able to say it again. I say that the reason why I wouldn't marry you was fear—simply fear."

He started to his feet with a laugh.

"You—Paula—fear? Of me? Or any existing thing? It's fantastic."

"Yes," she declared, throwing up her head. "Fear. Fear of my own weakness. Fear of losing my own individuality and being, as I said, merged in the Great Pandolfo. Do you know what you are?" All the attractions, all the repulsions, all the rebellions against his secretly confessed physical and spiritual dominance found impetuous expression. "You're just a human octopus. You have a hundred tentacles. You curve one round a human being and he or she—I'm not talking of sex, please remember—escape it—to find himself caught by another one unsuspected. And now you've come across a woman who has no use for octopuses, who's a sort of octopus herself, as far as I can gather, and it's you, my poor friend, who are caught. The littlest, finest, steeliest antennæ or tendrils or whatever you call the feelers of the beastly thing, the deadly coils of sex, got hold of you—and there you are. Octopus against octopus. She's better than you. What does she care about Andrea Vaccaro? What does she care about Paulinium? What does she care about the Great Pandolfo—your conception—the conception you've tried to impose on me—of the Great Pandolfo? Not a little two-penny-halfpenny damn. But, my good friend, she's logical; when she whipped the tentacles around your neck, she did it to satisfy an ap-

petite,—the appetite for a good time as she understands it, pearls, and lots of clothes, and race-meetings, and restaurants, and night-clubs, and dancing, and the chatter and the gossip and the scandal concerning all the putrescent world which contains her intimate friends."

"My God," said Pandolfo, with a hasty sweep of hand over hair, "how do you know that?"

She laughed. "How do I know when it's raining or when the sun shines?"

"I didn't think it was so obvious," he said bitterly. "After all," he continued, with a resumption of his old manner, "in a way, that's neither here nor there. I didn't come here to discuss my wife, or to listen to your masterly analysis of my character. I don't deny it's true. I can't help the way God made me. But He made me, all the same a great man, just as He made you a great woman. What are you and I to do?"

"The only common-sense thing is to keep out of each other's way," said Paula.

"We can't," cried Pandolfo, with dramatically uplifted hand. "That's the tragi-comedy of the whole thing. As I can't get away from you, so you can't get away from me. Do you suppose you could have written this last novel of yours, if I hadn't come into your life?"

She gasped for a moment, standing before him splendidly indignant.

"You're mad. Is there a line in it suggestive of any incident in our friendship? Any phase of it sentimental or otherwise? Any people that you or I know? Why, I had the groundwork in my head long before I met you. It's monstrous to say such a thing."

"It isn't," said he. "It's humble truth. Before you met me you couldn't write it. Afterwards, when I had

stirred up your soul and made you hate and love and hate again and throw yourself into the arms of another man so as to escape me, and then realize the ludicrousness of the proceeding—when I had made you grasp something of the Homeric sense of laughter. . . . Afterwards, I say, when you were struggling against me, when every fibre of you was re-strung to concert pitch, you sat down and produced a work of art. Your life of widowhood, your princess-walk through the great world, unchallenged on account of the beauty and the wonder of you, was deadening your genius—— No—there's no reason to throw up your hands in deprecation. The genius is one who creates. Anybody who creates something out of nothing has a bit of God, the Creator, in him. This bit of God in you was in process of atrophy. I came like a wind into your life and revivified it. It's no use your saying I'm talking like a madman. I know it's the truth. And it's no use your retorting that this is a culminating instance of my monstrous egoism."

"You're quite right," she said, with a touch of irony, "it wouldn't be much good, would it? And now that we've both said exactly what we think of each other, and you've rejected the only possible solution of the problem you put before me, what else, my dear Victor,"—she smiled a trifle wearily, and touched his sleeve—"what else have you to say to a bewildered woman?"

"That she's the only woman in the world for me and that I'm the only man in the world for her."

She turned away with a gesture of almost comic despair.

"Look," said he.

"Yes?"

He drew from his letter case a soiled folded paper, and, opening it, showed her a withered remnant of stalks and leaves.

"Do you remember this—the *orlaie?* I kept a sprig in memory. And you?"

She had all but forgotten the crazy adventure of the mountain flower; for never since had he made allusion to it. She thought it was dead and gone, hidden for ever in the limbo of foolish things. She fenced, with a short laugh.

"I? What do you mean?"

"You've kept your bit?"

For the first time since she was a girl, Paula Field flushed scarlet. There the dried flower lay, amid many odds and ends, in yonder drawer. Many times common sense had dictated its destruction; so many times had curious feminine workings bidden its preservation. Possibly it might have as its neighbour the dreadfully frayed half of a Harrow rosette, memorial of her first love affair culminating at a cricket match, ever so many years ago, when *he*—sixth-form prodigy—had cuddled her pig-tailed beauty—not daring to kiss her—behind a refreshment tent, and then had divided the token of eternal affection, with a blunt penknife on her upturned heel. He had gone to the bad, poor fellow—which was all that she knew. But she had kept his half-rosette. That and Pandolfo's *orlaie* and a few autographed menu cards and a mouldering bit of icing of her wedding cake and a dismal little photograph of a family group at Chadford when she was seven, a locket containing the hair of her great-grandmother, the Duchess of Risborough, and a score of such items of rubbish she had never the heart to throw away. They formed her own little intimate museum which she loved, and of which, at the same time, she was ashamed.

Thus, Pandolfo's challenge, or rather his unquestioning assertion, sent the blood to her face. She was too

proud to take refuge in denial; and yet, avowal would inevitably lead to misconstruction of motive. A humorous gleam in his eyes angered her. She crossed the room, pulled open the drawer, and there, sure enough, almost entangled in the wreck of the dark blue rosette, peered the skeleton of the Alpine flower. She held it out towards him.

"It was the least I could do. You nearly broke your neck to get it. But, my good friend, please consider it was a woman's sentimentality and nothing more."

"It's everything more," he said.

Of course the inevitable misconstruction. She grew furious.

"We can easily settle that," she declared, and with the dilapidated sprig between finger and thumb, she swept to the fireplace.

He sprang forward and, on hands and knees, rescued the thing, just as the edge had begun to crackle. He held it out in a blackened hand. She bent forward, frightened.

"You've burned yourself horribly."

"I wish I had burned my hand off, to show you that I am in earnest."

He put the rescued sprig in the drawer which he closed. "An indestructible link," he said.

He would not allow her to tend him, declaring the injury of the least importance. He made dramatic exit. At the door he turned, with blackened finger pointing to the drawer.

"It remains there, doesn't it?"

"Oh, of course," she cried helplessly. "But your hand . . ."

He laughed. "What does it matter, my Paula?" And was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

What did it all mean? Paula lunched with friends in a vague dream, came home, and in the quietude of her room gave herself up to the consideration of the baffling problem. Her meeting with Pandolfo had, of course, been fortuitous. Either that or predestined. He had caught her up in his maddening Jovian fashion and made her listen to him. But what had he to tell save the same old self-vaunting story, the same old proclamation of their inevitable union? Never before had she defended herself with such lucid valiancy. She had revealed in clear speech her soul's picture of him. He had accepted it without protest. Nay more, he had carelessly dashed on dark values. He had claimed as his own the spiritual force at the back of her novel. Was the amazing man mad or gifted with an uncanny insight? Monstrously impudent or superbly conscious of his power?

Let her think.

He was right in saying that when she had roughed out the scheme of the novel, she was incapable of writing it. It was beyond her artistic strength. Conscious of the fact she had let it lie uncared for in the dust-bin of her mind. Then he had come, upheaving all the placidities of her life, arousing undreamed of antagonisms, awakening dormant impulses, and she had sat down and, day by day, written vivid and emotional pages, of whose value, at the time, she had been unconscious; of whose value, until a few hours ago, she had been unconscious. . . .

On the other hand, she argued, she had been driven by

necessity. The impending fall of the House of Veresy had been a mighty incentive to effort. But would that, of itself, have accounted for the full swing of inspiration or whatever it was that had carried her through those bleak and dreary months at Chadford? Would not the despair of the place rather have impoverished than enriched her? To what had she owed the uplifting sense of mastery which had enabled her, with smug serenity, to accomplish her task? That the book was a success there was no doubt; not only one of esteem, but of truth-telling money. It was a good, sincere book, grappling honestly with human problems. On publication, she had read it through critically and was mildly surprised by her impersonal interest. In the cold print of the bound volume, the emotional scenes, the undercurrents of passion and philosophy of life seemed to have been written by some unknown author.

This impression she now recalled. Again, was the amazing man right? Was he and his communicated vitality at the back of her spirit all the time?

Beyond this prodigious statement, he had told her nothing. For aught he said, he might have been in the hey-day of his pride. Not a word of Paulinium. Not a word of falling fortunes. Save for the ageing of his face, he gave the appearance of being as magnificent as ever. His car blazed splendour. His attire—blue suit, purple shirt, tie and socks—carefully selected, was that of the rich man. Of Spencer Babington's insinuation of poverty he gave no sign. Also he had gone off, with burned fingers, in theatrical triumph.

What did it all mean? Save for his declaration that he was God's greatest fool, he had said nothing of his married life. She had described Lady Pandolfo to him; he had remained Jovianly silent, as though the woman had

ceased to exist as a factor in the problem of their lives.

What did it all mean? She felt unaccountably shaken. She reflected that she had not seen Gregory Uglow for a long while. His aloofness almost amounted to desertion. Lady Demeter too had vainly tried to grasp a curiously elusive young man. Surely he must have the key to the enigma. She went to the telephone and rang him up. As on previous occasions, he was not at home. The servant with whom she was in communication didn't know when he would return. In fact he had been out of town for some time. In Staffordshire? Yes. The servant thought he was at the works. For a moment she thought of asking for Pandolfo, if only to enquire about the burned hand; then, rejecting the idea, she rang off.

The next morning's newspaper gave her the sudden tidings that "Paulinium Steel, Limited," was going into liquidation. "The company inaugurated by the famous inventor, Sir Victor Pandolfo," so ran the paragraph, "in order to exploit his new metal Paulinium that was to take the place of steel, has been unsuccessful in attaining its object, owing, it is believed, to the failure in the supply of the secret ore which plays an analogous part in its manufacture to that of Spiegeleisen in the Bessemer process. Interesting and sensational developments are expected."

Her heart sank. This was the end foreshadowed by Gregory Uglow on that past May morning. Pandolfo was defeated, possibly ruined. And yet, yesterday he had stood before her in his old conquering guise.

She wrote impulsively:

"My Dear, Dear Friend,

"This news, if I read it right, is dreadful. Why didn't you tell me, so that I could have given you some kind of loving sympathy? You must be heart-broken. When you do find a minute, do come to me. And your poor fingers. How are they? Yours, Paula."

This she despatched by messenger boy. Within an hour he brought a reply, in Pandolfo's great, firm handwriting.

"*Io son io;* remember Henley's verse. My hands are clean, literally and figuratively. Have faith in me."

The days went on, but he did not come. Gregory Uglow returning to town, explained over the telephone that the great man was wrestling with beasts at Ephesus. Nothing to do but sit and listen to the myriad-tongued gossip of London. Pandolfo's name became as mud. He was a crack-brained adventurer, a charlatan, an exploiter of credulous investors; he had pocketed a quarter of a million; he had fled; he had stolen the notion of his secret process from a poverty-stricken scientist years before; he had murdered him; he had stolen all the inventions that had made him famous; he was penniless, going about cadging for ten-pound notes; his father had been an organ-grinder with a monkey. At any rate his career was that of the rocket and the stick. Down he must come. . . . That seemed to Paula the only thing certain in all the wild rumours.

"I told you so," said Spencer Babington.

Tongues were not less idle concerning Lady Pandolfo. Here they had more authentic grounds on which to wag. Suddenly everybody appeared to have known of her as a notorious woman, a common hetaira of gentle birth and position.

"You may take it from me," said Spencer, "that the following is exact. You'll do me the credit of vouching for me as no scandalmonger. Also my training has enabled me to penetrate the clouds of imagination and prejudice and follow the clear line of fact. And, in this case I've taken particular pains to get this clear line."

She was really the daughter of a Canon of Ely, and had married the Comte de Bréville, a deboshed member of the old French nobility. But she had been as deboshed as he. Long before his death in the odour of sinfulness, she had been the *maîtresse en titre* of one of his friends and neighbours, from whom she had run away with a wealthy Italian manufacturer. The Comte de Bréville, a strict Catholic, in spite of his unsavoury existence, refused to divorce her—in order to marry him she had been received into the Catholic Church—and wiped her out of his memory. He died, after spending the last penny of his fortune, and left her to the world's mercy. And so, as in a figure of a dismal dance, she had gone from one adventure to another, ever grasping after the poverty-haunted way of her kind; ever managing to dress, wear jewels, and live in luxury; ever succeeding in the maintenance of a vague social position. One man she had ruined, a young American who had shot himself in a hotel corridor outside her room in Monte Video. The boy's name was Bellamy Shanks, an attaché of legation in Uruguay.

"I got this from his cousin who's in the American Embassy here," said Spencer.

Paula listened with the sheltered woman's disgust. She knew the type, although she could not understand it. Her mind refused to travel beyond the laws of her caste. That the ranks of the hetairæ should be recruited from little milliners, mannequins, chorus girls, and such beautiful sea-foam sparkling refreshingly over the billows of the lower classes was, in the nature of things, scarcely reprehensible from the point of view of the sea-foam. But that a lady born and bred should take up the profession was incomprehensible.

"And how much of this, do you think, does Pandolfo know?"

Spencer made his little diplomatic concession to foreign gesture.

"My dear, if she hasn't told him herself, who is there would tell him? Pandolfo isn't a man to whom one can go and say—'Your wife is this, that, and the other.' "

That he married the syren in ignorance of her syrenic record, she felt assured. In a flash he had given her the reason, and she still shivered with a cold shame at the justice of it. *Faute de grives on mange des merles.* The bluntest of sexual declarations. But that was a matter of long ago. The immediate question was his knowledge now.

Even whether he knew or not, she felt maddeningly certain that such a woman, in this crisis of his life, was rather millstone round his neck than ark of safety.

She wrote again: a long and foolish letter which she tore up and threw into the fire. Then a short note:

"For God's sake tell me if I can't do anything for you."

Then came back the answer.

"When the sun is eclipsed there's nothing to do but wait until the darkness is over."

Which for Pandolfo was deeply pessimistic.

Gregory came at last, ill, haggard, looking like death. The past months had been nightmare. He explained what had happened in terms comprehensible to her lay mind. The rich streak of the secret ore had petered out. All Pandolfo's researches in Brazil had failed to discover another. Yet, in terms of liquid, a faint quantity remained in solution. A few pounds running through a ton, which, though not a commercial proposition, had kept hope alive. In the laboratory they had worked them-

selves grey experimenting with the residue and with other cognate ores. And then, after the first few orders, the metal had shown flaws; there had been breaks-down for which the buying firms had claimed compensation. Finally there was no more money to carry on the company even on its experimental side, and now nothing left on which to experiment. Paulinium was dead and in its grave were buried many hundreds of thousands of pounds.

"And Pandolfo?" she asked.

"He must stand the racket. At present he's a rock, not caring a damn for anybody. Give him a year and he'll make another fortune for everybody. So he says."

"He has lost everything, then?"

"As far as I can see. He must go through the court."

"Bankruptcy?" Her voice quavered on the word which, to her, held almost a criminal flavour.

Gregory uttered a helpless "Of course," and stared at her gloomily.

"That means the selling up of everything—home, pictures . . ."

He nodded. "He would never believe it would come. Something would happen. Until a few days ago there was still a man and a gang of workmen digging holes in the Andes. . . . Yes, naturally, when a man's bankrupt he has to surrender every blessed thing he's possessed of. It's heart-breaking, it's damnable. Though I've seen it coming for a year, I've never realized what it would be like."

There was a long silence. Outside a gusty rain marked the setting in of the dreary March twilight. The maid brought in tea. They drank mechanically. At last Paula asked:

"And you? What is your position?"

He groaned. "I feel a brute not to be able to go down with him on the sinking ship. But that would do neither him nor me any good. I might just as well sit outside his door and refuse food, like a dog. Without my knowledge he has worked me into a big position with the Blickham-Anstruther people—you know—of course you do—they're world-famous."

He described with some vividness the little scene. The vast octagonal room, half library, half laboratory, into which Pandolfo had dragged him penniless from the Embankment, many years before. They sat on opposite sides of the library table examining the morning's dreadful correspondence. The telephone between them rang. Gregory stretched out his hand as usual to take the message; but Pandolfo, impatiently bade him carry on with complicated figures with which he was engaged.

Pandolfo, ear to receiver, uttered his usual quick: "Yes—yes—yes——" And at last: "Of course he's a damned fool. But don't you know that a fool can't be damned unless there's something in him worth damnation? Keep it open. You won't regret it. Wait till I kick him from here to hell. . . . what?"—he laughed boyishly—"No, nothing personal. If I'm not picturesque I'm naught. Right. Thank you. Good-bye."

Then he thumped the table with both hands.

"You astounding young ass! What in God's name made you turn down Blickham and Anstruther?"

For Gregory had received a letter the evening before from that classical firm. Understanding that he was about to sever his long connection with Sir Victor Pandolfo, they would be glad to know if he would care to entertain a proposal they were prepared to put before him in an interview that could be arranged over the telephone with the writer of the letter. And he had replied forth-

with that he had no intention of leaving Sir Victor's service.

"It stands to reason," said Gregory, "how can I leave you?"

"'I'll never desert Mr. Micawber.'" Pandolfo laughed. "But Mr. Micawber can't afford the luxury of highly trained scientific secretaries. In fact he hasn't a thing for the highly trained scientist to do, and not a red cent to pay him further salary."

"Oh, damn the salary," cried the young man indignantly.

"I've noticed in the course of a vehement life," said Pandolfo, "that damning things hasn't the least effect on them. The position is this. You've got to be fed, clothed, and housed. How are you going to attain these necessaries of life without a salary, damn it though you may? You may, in your loyalty, make the rejoinder that if I start out with a wallet on my back, and a hat stolen from a scarecrow, and grow a hedgehog beard and take to the high road, you'll do the same. If you don't realize that this would cause me the greatest possible irritation and annoyance, you haven't yet begun to understand my character. The proposal that Blickham-Anstruther's are ready to make you is one that I myself arranged."

"You—in all this tornado of worry?"

Pandolfo leaned back and snapped his fingers in the air.

"Good God! What's a tornado? What chance has it against a human soul?"

He lit a cigar and turned to the papers he was reading when the telephone disturbed him.

"Ring up Merivale now and make your appointment."

"I'll do no such thing," said Gregory.

"That Orkney and Shetland, Pictish mother of yours! She gave you all the virtues except gratitude."

Gregory Uglow sprang to his feet.

How dare he say that? What other sentiment could possibly inspire his present attitude?

Pandolfo bent over the table and held him with his clear eyes.

"I think to refuse the last gift your greatest friend in the world can give you—the result merely of his affection and solicitude is ungracious."

Gregory had to yield, feeling mean, as he told Paula. What else was there to do? She knew Pandolfo's way. Paula agreed that his acceptance of the position was the only course open to him. It would have been more romantic to starve at Pandolfo's heels; but the proceeding would have lacked common sense. It was also Pandolfo's way to be reckoned with. He gave to the last.

"I'd have to do something, sooner or later," said Gregory. "And this means a couple of thousand a year and a future before me. All his doing, of course."

He was miserably apologetic, dreading a fall in his lady's esteem. She laughed at him gently, repeating previous argument. But curiously uninvested in the glamour of Pandolfo, she regarded him, against her will and her reason, in a new light; that of the interesting yet commonplace young man who was making his way in the world.

He stood shamefaced before her as he took his leave.

"It's a ghastly business altogether," said he. "You won't throw me over, will you?"

Her conscience pricked her; tears came into her eyes.

"Throw you over? Why should I? Aren't we all wretched together?"

He was already outside the flat door when it occurred to her that he had not mentioned Lady Pandolfo. What was she doing in this tornado of worry as he had termed

it? She met him on the landing, just as the lift ascended.

"And she—how is she taking it?"

"I should say badly. But that side of things is a mystery to me. She loathed me at first sight, as you know—I seldom met her in the house and he scarcely ever refers to her."

"Where is she now?"

"Abroad. Monte Carlo, I believe. At any rate, I took her tickets some weeks ago. . . . The sinking ship, I suppose."

The electric bell jarred in the lift summoned for some other floor. The lift-man asked:

"Are you going down, sir, or shall I come back and fetch you?"

"I'll go now," said Gregory. "That's really all I know."

With what truth she had rhetorically proclaimed their common wretchedness, she did not surmise till a day or two later when her father burst unexpectedly upon her. He was the picture of the fine old English gentleman facing adversity with almost apoplectic indignation.

Had she seen these infernal newspaper reports? What was it all about? What was the truth of it? She knew the man and must be aware of the real state of affairs which one could never learn from those scoundrelly and lying papers. Young Bulstrode was in a devil of a way and had told him he had better come up to town and find out what he could.

"If he has been buying shares in Paulinium, I'm afraid he has lost them. I'm sorry for him," said Paula.

"I don't care tuppence what he has bought. What does it matter to me?" stormed Mr. Veresy.

"Take off your overcoat and sit down, my dear," said Paula soothingly; and while she was aiding him—"Of

course it's a tragic affair for Pandolfo. The seam of secret ore that makes Paulinium has given out and they can't find any more. So the metal can't be made and the whole thing has collapsed."

"Then it *is* true?"

"Only too true. My poor friend's ruined."

Mr. Veresy started up in his chair and threw out his arms wide.

"Then—good God! Don't you see that I'm ruined too?"

"You? What have you got to do with Paulinium?"

"How do you suppose I can pay the interest on the mortgage and live, dammit, after all, like a gentleman, without Paulinium?"

"I never supposed anything," said Paula. "You both —Pandolfo and yourself—assured me that it was a straightforward business arrangement on both sides. As you wouldn't tell me any more and you were both honourable men, I took your words for it."

"Of course it was honourable—at any rate as far as I was concerned. I had implicit faith in the fellow—and, to give the devil his due, he had faith in himself. He convinced me that Paulinium shares would go bang up sky-high—and that in point of fact I was doing him the favour——"

"I don't understand," said Paula, drawing up a chair to the fire. "You had better tell me everything from the beginning."

In his ex-dragoon's way he unfolded a story which left Paula aghast. Even her careless woman's elementary idea of business was outraged. The transaction was fantastic.

Mr. Veresy paid, it seemed, the interest on the mortgage not in cash, but in purchased Paulinium shares. At

the time of the mad arrangement, the £100 shares were issued at £10 leaving a liability of £90 per share. But Pandolfo took the shares in payment of the mortgage interest, and accepted the unpaid liability. Thus Mr. Veresy was given a receipt in full for actually only one-tenth of the interest. This arrangement was to last for three years, at the end of which, when the shares should have reached dizzy heights, multiplying themselves a thousandfold in value, Pandolfo was to transfer half of them back, as a free gift to Mr. Veresy, who would then find himself in a position to pay off the whole mortgage, while Pandolfo himself would be in the enjoyment of a small fortune far exceeding the aggregate amount of the three years' interest.

This, as far as she could gather from the muddled account, was the essence of the childish matter. She marvelled at the guilelessness of her father, who could for a moment have been gulled by such a proposition. No wonder he had called Pandolfo a damned fine fellow!

Of course, it was one of Pandolfo's magnificent masterstrokes of egotistic generosity. He had sworn that Chadford Park should not pass into "alien" hands, and, all for her sake, had he devised this crazy scheme. She could hear him, perfervidly eloquent, confusing her honest father's brain with fairy tales of Paulinium, and, at the same time, convincing him that he, Pandolfo, was driving a hard bargain. . . .

And shrewd Mr. Veresy, in view of the inevitable appreciation of Paulinium shares, and so as not to be caught napping, had laid in a three years' stock.

"I couldn't touch what little capital I have left," he groaned, "so I had to sell some diamonds that belonged to your dear mother. For God's sake don't tell Myrtilla."

She pondered for a while, searching her vague store of business knowledge.

"There must have been a shareholders' meeting. Didn't you attend it?"

Mr. Veresy murmured something about proxies. He had been busy when the papers came: besides his holding was insignificant. He hadn't gone into the matter, not dreaming that he wasn't safe in the hands of Pandolfo.

"Then how do we stand now, dear?" asked Paula.

"We don't stand. Don't you see? The damn shares are worth nothing and"—he buried his face in his hands —"we're all in the cart!"

She caressed his bowed shoulders, spoke words of consolation. There must be some simple way out which Pandolfo had foreseen. He had been sending her all sorts of reassuring messages. Mr. Veresy raised his head. Had she talked with him about it? What had he to say for himself? Paula explained that she had only seen him once and then they hadn't talked about mortgages.

"But he'll talk now, if I ring him up," she declared radiantly. "Either here, or at his house. All will be well."

She went to the telephone, conscious of her power. Gregory replied.

Pandolfo had gone to Monte Carlo.

"The fellow has done a bolt," cried Mr. Veresy.

CHAPTER XX

Pandolfo had not bolted in Mr. Veresy's sense of the word. A telegram from his wife had sent him flying south. Ordinary mortals must book seats on the Blue Train a month in advance. Pandolfo's peculiar wizardry found a berth at a few hours' notice. Broken in fortune, not even quite certain whether he was committing a criminal offence in leaving England and his snarling pack of creditor wolves, he felt again the old thrill of power, when the Wagon-lit agent met him at Calais, hat in hand.

"*Oui Monsieur,* it is all arranged. We received instructions and there happened, *justement,* to be one compartment cancelled at the last moment."

It is only the powerful who can command the cancellation of a compartment at the last moment. Pandolfo, like a king, followed the deeply impressed porter who carried his luggage, and entered the oblong box, which the Compagnie Internationale des Wagons-Lits fondly imagine to be the last word in the luxury of travel. How long his kingship would endure was another matter. He gave the porter twenty francs.

He dined. He slept. At noon on a March day blazing with sunshine, he stepped out of the train at Monte Carlo. He looked up and down the platform, seeking, if not a welcoming, at least a greeting face.

There was the usual throng of friends meeting friends, and gay handshakes and embraces, and the laughter and the excitement of the fortunate sojourners in proclaiming to late fog-bound and rain-sodden travellers the glories of sun and sky. Pandolfo frowned as though his king-

ship had passed from him. Leaving his suit-case in charge of the conductor of the hotel omnibus, he mounted by the lift to the Casino terrace and strolled slowly along, filling his lungs with the warm sweet air and his eyes with the blue of the enchanted sea. For the moment troubles melted in the golden mystery of the light. He went up the terrace steps and stood watching the familiar scene. The grey mountains beyond, the trim and tiny miniature park, the circular garden, the White Hôtel de Paris on the left, the Café de Paris with its gay terrace of crowded tables, the idle men and women, crossing and re-crossing, the long line of the Casino, the pigeons fluttering about its cornices, the continuous trickle of humans entering and emerging from the small doors, like bees using their hive. Time might have stood still from such a morning three years ago when he had last stood on that spot. Nothing had changed. The same cheery black doorkeeper, his blue coat ablaze with war decorations, stood, with the same smile outside the Hôtel de Paris. The same cars wheeled around discreetly. He turned with a sigh, and prepared to cross the square in the direction of the hotel where his wife was staying, when he saw her run down the Casino steps.

He advanced, bare-headed, to greet her. They shook hands.

"I really meant to meet your train and I only went in there to put in time. But there was a run on my numbers. It would have been wicked to leave."

"I hope you found it worth your while," said he.

"I picked up twelve thousand."

"My congratulations."

They walked a few paces in silence. At last she said:

"It was very decent of you to come. Until I got your telegram I didn't know whether you would or not."

"You're my wife. You're Lady Pandolfo. You wired me you were in terrible trouble. I couldn't do otherwise than come." Then, dropping the ironical, he flashed round on her, "What have you been doing now?"

She looked up at him rather frightened. "Hadn't we better wait until you've been to the hotel and changed? I've got you a comfortable room at the Paris, as I wired you. My hotel's chock-a-block. . . . You must be so tired after your long journey."

He laughed. "Have you ever seen me tired? Or the worse for travelling?" He looked as spruce and point-device in his blue-striped suit and clean linen, as any of the men lounging in that lounger's paradise. "There are all conveniences for cleanliness on the Blue Train." He drew off his new wash-leather gloves which he put in his pocket, and displayed immaculate hands. "No; but I am hungry: it is nearly one o'clock. What you have to say would be better said in the comfort of the open air over a comfortable lunch-table, than in the stuffiness of a private room in a hotel. For there, God knows when one'd get anything to eat."

She halted in their slow course, by the tobacconist's at the corner of the Café de Paris.

"I'd sooner we were alone," she said, with the hardening of the eyes to which he had grown accustomed. "But if it's your good pleasure. . . . At any rate, you'll promise not to make a scene."

An habitual gesture accompanied a laugh. "And throw my arms about——?"

"You're doing it now," she said.

"Forgive me. The Knight of the British Empire shall strangle the Neapolitan *lazzarone*. I promise. And when I break my promise, it's what insurance policies re-

fer to as an Act of God. Have I ever broken a promise that I've made you?"

"I do you the credit——" she began almost reluctantly, and the meaningless words which she would have said died away.

"Let us lunch then. Here? There is noise—music and chatter. We can talk without being overheard. It's ideal." He made way for her. "Will you?"

She paused for an instant before obeying his courteous gesture.

"If you only knew how I hate your damned perfect manners!"

Threading their way through the miniature forest of gaudy umbrellas that shaded the terrace tables, they reached the end where the pleasant restaurant began. A *maître d'hôtel* rushed forward, presented a table in a corner remote from the band.

"*Ah, Monsieur Pandolfo, il y a déja longtemps*——" etcetera, etcetera.

Pandolfo called him by name, asked him the news of his family. There was a newcomer three years ago.

Precisely. The child was in perfect health. Ran about like a grown-up person. Always at Sospel? *Mais oui, Monsieur Pandolfo.* The mountain air. There was nothing like it. And what would Monsieur desire? Habit made him present the long menu-card. Monsieur in his grand manner waved it away, and, like a god ordaining, ordered the meal.

"And two sweet Martinis at once and then your excellent Monaco beer which I have not had for three years. I don't consult you, my dear Nesta, for I know your tastes. Still, if you have a caprice. . . . Veuve Cliquot, Château Yquem. . . .?"

A smile, in spite of her preoccupation came into her eyes.

"You know. You always do."

"Eh bien. Ça y est." He dismissed the *maître d'hôtel.*

" 'Their last lunch together.' It may be so. Perhaps not quite so exciting as Browning's ride. But it has possibilities. At any rate, let us hope that Jules will put the fear of Pandolfo into the chef."

Elbow on table, cheeks supported in her fists, she looked at him.

"After all, Victor, you're a wonderful man."

He unfolded his napkin. "Have I ever said anything to the contrary?"

"How could you remember the man's name and his child and where his rotten family lived?"

"It has been my business to be a master of detail," said he.

The waiter set the *hors d'œuvre.* Ever courteous host, he consulted her choice. The meal began.

"Will you now tell me what's the trouble?"

She made a gesture towards the Casino over the way.

"That is."

"How much?"

"Everything."

She entered upon the gambler's story of black and relentless ill-luck, representing herself as the innocent victim of diabolic agencies. She had begun by winning. It was necessary for her to win, in view of the precariousness of her income in the immediate future. Had he not told her that he was ruined and that, henceforward, she must cut down her expenses to a limit he could not yet define? If he could not make the money, she must make it herself. The tables seemed the most certain way.

And she would have made it had it not been for the dark league of devils aforesaid. She had kept a few hundred francs. The good angels battling on her side had thrust her into the room that morning and had temporarily prevailed over the Powers of Darkness, seeing that she had come out with twelve thousand francs.

Pandolfo drank his Martini. "What have you been playing? Not this morning—but before?"

"*Trente et quarante.*"

"The great game? Maximums?"

She confessed. It was the only way to make the fortune she required.

"When you left me," said he, "we calculated that you would have enough, in ready money at the bank, to live on comfortably for at least a year. You yourself suggested a sum."

"And you increased it. I can't accuse you of lack of generosity," she conceded.

He bowed acknowledgment. "And all that has gone?"

"Yes, it's gone. Beyond my twelve thousand francs I haven't a penny. Oh, I know I've played the fool. I'm grateful to you for not cursing me."

"Who could curse on such a morning and in such pleasant surroundings?"

He glanced round and catching sight of a city acquaintance some few tables away, smiled and swept a hand of greeting.

"You're resolved," she said bitterly, "that no one should suspect you of being other than the perfect *galantuomo*."

"But am I not, my dear Nesta?" said he with a laugh.

She pushed away her plate. "How you can eat, I don't know."

"I'm hungry, and food is good and the sun is shining

and I have faith in my power to survive any catastrophe."

She shrugged her shoulders, made a pretence of picking at the next dish to which she was served. But, aware of the importance of flaunting, before this gay social world around them, her cordial relations with her husband, she divagated into the gossip of the place, named the people who were there, talked distractedly of the hotel. Then returned to her late amazing run of ill-luck. It had created a small sensation. The wretched papers had got hold of it. She said devastating things about newspapers. He agreed that sometimes they missed the finer shades of tact and discretion. As she knew, they had been busy for some time with his own affairs.

At last, hunger satisfied, a cigar between his lips and a glass of old Armagnac before him, he said:

"A telegram would have brought you funds for immediate necessities. A letter would have explained your —may I say so—lamentable position. Unless there is something you've not yet told me, why bring me here?"

He held out a match across the table to light the cigarette which shook ever so slightly between her fingers.

"I don't know whether it's cruel or considerate of you to make me say everything to you here."

He bent forward. "Can't you, of all people, realize that the Englishman is sometimes afraid of the Neapolitan? What else has happened?"

"Well—can't you see, I'm penniless?"

"At a pinch, there are your jewels——"

She looked away from him. "They've been stolen. I've been robbed."

He laid down his cigar and contemplated her fragile fairness and falseness. The adjustment of his mind to hers took some moments. He shook his head.

"Do you still, after all this time, take me for a fool? If you had been robbed, that is the first frantic news you would have given me. Why more lies? Didn't we agree the night before you left London that we should be done with them?"

There she sat opposite to him, pink and fair and powdered and rouged and pencilled, all in discreet accordance with modern conventions. She was a beautiful woman of her type, irreproachably dressed, and, but for a certain air of distinction, would have passed unnoticed among the hundred women of all ages similarly made up and attired, who took part in that cool pageant of idleness. Nothing about her to betray the woman that he had long since known her to be. Her dark blue eyes beamed candour, and the little criss-cross lines of anxiety beneath them were all but massaged away; her lips and teeth when she smiled were those of a girl. Who could remark the flash of hardness, the twist of cruelty? She was as fair now as on that first day when he met her on the steamer's deck. And she lied now, as she lied then. But in those early days she had some object—marriage with a man in good position. Had she, in manner no matter however grandly heroic, revealed to him the blatant truths of her past life, he would never have married her. In self-defence she had flung the facts at him some time since, and he had yielded. Daughter of Hagar, although self-constituted, she was within her rights. *Caveat emptor.* He had found it in his heart to forgive her. His recognition did not restore romantic passion; but it provided a basis of life. His sole stipulation was that there should be no more lies. And now came this absurd, this idiotic falsehood.

"They're pawned," she said, "at half, quarter their value. Isn't that robbery? I didn't want to sell them

outright. I hoped to make enough to get them back. . . ."

"You're a woman of many phases," said he after a while. "This is my first introduction to you as a gambler."

"I've gambled with life since I was a school-girl. You, too, have gambled with life. You ought to understand. You say you're down and out. I'm down and out. What's the difference between us?"

"I take your point," said he. "I agree that we're both adventurers. I used the word in its constricted sense—the local sense."

"In that sense, I've never gambled before. Not seriously."

"Why?" he asked gently. "It would be interesting to know."

She bit her lip. "A great intellect like yours ought to guess. Before I married you I had men either behind me or in prospect. I had no need to try to make money at gaming tables."

He swept a hand over his smooth bronze hair. "I am answered. I'm sorry. Unwittingly I opened a chapter that we agreed should be closed."

"It has got to be opened again, anyway," she said after a pause. "I hate myself."

"No, my dear Nesta, you hate me."

She drew a breath and looked around and leaned across the table.

"I don't. It's myself. I know I've been a rotten wife to you. It's because I'm not built that way. It's my fault or my misfortune, whichever you like. But for what it's worth, I've been faithful to you. You must take that as truth. I have some sense of honour. That's really why I asked you to come."

And while waiting for his reply, she pressed with peculiar care the stub of her cigarette against the ash-tray.

"It goes without saying—the contrary idea is fantastically insulting—that I have held you above suspicion."

"Cæsar's wife!" she checked a touch of the hysterical. "No, Victor—I was a fool to marry a man like you," she continued, her eyes averted. "I ought to have known better. Oh, it's a tribute to you and not a reproach. . . . There are some women who are mergers and others who aren't. I'm like you—a mergee." She flashed a wry smile. "I've wanted everything—and I've had everything from men. Their lives, their interests haven't concerned me. . . . I thought you were like the others—in that way. You gave profusely—I'm talking seriously for once, Victor—you gave like a god—but all the time I felt the vast hand of the god over me, compelling me to him, to his personality, to his personal sphere, to something I didn't care a hang about, to something I should never be able to appreciate or understand. I express myself badly . . . I wanted all the things you've given me, but as you couldn't share them, what use have they been to me? Nothing. . . . Oh we've had all this out before. . . ."

"Perhaps not quite so openly, my dear Nesta," said Pandolfo. He bent forward with the bottle of old Armagnac. "Just a tiny drop to deceive the gaping herd. They think I'm ruined. They know that you've lost what in their eyes constitutes a fortune at the tables, and we're objects of damnable interest. Put the glass again to your lips."

He bowed and smiled with uplifted glass and they seemed to pledge each other.

"Isn't it great comedy?"

She warmed to his words. "Why the devil did I ever marry you? What a lover you would make!" She drank off her Armagnac with a little air of recklessness. "Yes, you're right. You have the faculty of always being right—up to a point. Your word 'openly.' It's quite true. We can't lose our tempers and make a scene. We can tell each other deadly things, with a smile on our faces. And we've got to keep the smile. What were we saying? Oh, yes. Your life mattered nothing to me. And why? Because, my dear, I'm not a wife. Perhaps if we had had a child, things might have been different. But I doubt it. I very much doubt it. I'm the born *cocotte*. . . . Oh, it's no use your holding up polite hands. You've got the truth at last and you know it to be the truth. I lay myself bare before you. Just as I'm not the woman to be wife or mother, I'm not either a Messalina, or one of the *grandes amoureuses*. . . . Manon Lescaut, la Dame aux Camellias—etcetera. That side of things is to me of the least importance. Oh—I don't want to be physiological—you must know what I mean. Yet you don't. Men, even Great Pandolfos, are dense. How can I explain? There are certain queer men who can't conceive any other way of earning their living than by hunting up genealogies in museums. It's their trade decreed by the Almighty. So there are certain queer women who are impelled to follow the oldest profession in the world. It's God's decree. They can't help it. I'm one of them. There's no question of religion, conscience or morality. . . . Of course, for a woman and a wife to say such a thing to her husband across a luncheon-table in the middle of all this sunshine and beauty seems the last word of cynicism. It may be—but at any rate, in my case, it's truth——When I married you, I thought I could retire. Like most other

professions, it has its anxieties and its disillusions——" She broke into a nervous laugh. "There is always the mirage of marriage before us; the Alms-house for our old age. . . . With me, the devil of it was, that I wasn't old enough. . . . I was afraid and ran into the Alms-house too soon. . . . I'm sure you were right to have this talk out here. Within four walls—I shouldn't like those twitching fingers of yours."

The open-air restaurant began to thin. Already a trickle of idiot bees was disappearing into the hive across the way. The orchestra struck up its last number—a flaming jazz.

"I still don't know," said Pandolfo, "why you asked me to come."

She regarded him anxiously.

"You've made no reply to what I've just told you. You've sat there, a man with a mask, a man I've never met before. I think I've shown myself to you as soul-naked as a woman can."

He threw his cigar away behind the screen of tubbed foliage.

"What did you expect me to answer?"

"As you seem to be keeping hold over yourself, you might very politely tell me to go back to my *métier* and the place I belong to, and that you cursed the day you married me and so forth and so forth. And that you would welcome any opportunity I gave you for regaining your freedom. . . . You found me out very quickly. Whatever you felt for me soon went. My fault, I admit. We hated the sight and the sound of each other. Now I've told you the truth at last, as far as my brain can express truth—and that's a very difficult thing for a woman like me—accustomed to run to earth at every sign of danger, instead of going the straight course—now I've

confessed the mad fool I've been here and, as I said, stripped myself soul-naked, you must loathe me. Why don't you say so? Then I'll know where I am."

Said he, with a smile. "I've never admired you so much as at this moment."

She drew a short breath and looked from side to side in an odd way.

"You've committed an act of amazing folly," he continued "But it was great folly." He swept one of his big gestures. "For the first time you reveal yourself as a spacious human creature. Forgive me if I seem to be critical. Why have we never met before in this wide horizon? You've kept yourself cramped within narrow limits—why? You are capable of great things, if you only knew it."

"Because I've lost a fortune in a few weeks and confessed myself what I am?"

"Precisely," said he.

She could not repress a wistful admiration in her eyes.

"You are magnificent!"

He leaned back in his chair.

"So are you. Here we are facing the world without a penny piece between us. Great gamblers both."

He lit another cigar. The orchestra crashed out the final chords of the jazz tune and packed up their instruments. Pandolfo called the leader and gave him largess. To-morrow would be ruin, stern and bleak. He would have fallen down from his high estate. But let him fall like Lucifer. He beckoned the waiter, ready with folded bill on plate. Largesse again. Nesta watched his superb disdain of economical pettiness. When the crowd of beneficiaries had bowed themselves away, she leaned again across the table.

"Won't you be frank with me—let me know the exact

truth? You say you're ruined. What does it mean?"

"Until I can come to a settlement with my creditors—the petition in bankruptcy will be presented very soon—I have only a few hundred pounds I can honestly call my own."

She lay back, white, half-stunned. Her brain had not grasped the significance of the catastrophe. In a few words he sketched the situation. As they were meeting frankly for the first time since their relationship, it was right that she should know. She bent forward again haggardly.

"My God! Then what's going to happen to me?"

"What I have is yours," said he grandly. "It won't keep you long in Monte Carlo. I should advise your living in retreat for a while—until things right themselves. If you're big enough to live in a tiny way for a few months—a sacrifice, I admit—I am big enough to come to your aid and replace you in your position."

A waiter came up following the routine of changing the ash-laden plates. Pandolfo waved him away impatiently. By this time theirs was almost the only table occupied. Nesta, struggling with new conceptions, made one or two vain attempts to speak. An unaccustomed lump in her throat choked her. At last——

"You gave me a cheque for six thousand pounds. If you only have a few hundred now, you must have given me everything you had——"

"I don't count what I give," said he. "It's not my way."

"It isn't. Now I know it. Too late. Oh, my God, what a fool I've been! Tell me, Victor, as one human soul to another. Wouldn't you like to get rid of me . . . to put me out of your life altogether? . . . On that voyage out you told me of a woman you were in love

with. Paula Field. I came in as the consoler. One of the tricks of my trade. . . . You know your Shakespeare. . . . It was only because Rosaline turned him down that Romeo took up with Juliet. . . . Oh, I know all about it. But I've never mentioned Rosaline, have I? At any rate, I've been discreet. I've heard vaguely about her. I've seen her once or twice. A beautiful statuesque woman. . . . I can give you every just cause. It's as easy as falling off a log."

He frowned and rose and, mechanically, she rose too.

"Let us walk a little. You're losing self-control There's another hour or two of sunshine."

They descended, past the fountain, to the eastern end of the Casino Terrace, almost deserted in the afternoons. They stood by the parapet over-looking the railway line, with green tiled, toy signal-box in front of them.

"You can't prevent me, if I choose to do it," she said at last.

He took her somewhat roughly by the shoulders. "Do you think that I—I, Victor Pandolfo—am the man to accept that supreme sacrifice?"

She looked into his eyes with a faltering courage. "Is there another man in the world who would talk of what I mean as a sacrifice? But there would be none. I'd go back, of my own free choice, to my old life of luxury . . . which you can't afford to give me any longer."

He said: "For the last time, I tell you, don't lie. You would never go back of your own choice. For the last two hours you've shown yourself too big to do it."

"But if I did and gave you proof, you would divorce me," she persisted.

The man flamed, and to her and to the blue Mediterranean and to the sedate uniformed *gardien,* some twenty yards away, he thundered:

"No."

He made wild gestures, reverberating, "No." Then he stood before her.

"I give, but I don't accept—least of all dishonour," he declared dramatically.

The weary-souled woman could not repress a smile of mockery.

"The Old Guard dies, but never surrenders."

His mood changed and he laughed: "Well, that's the end of this foolery." And he grew eloquent over the azure of sea and sky as they strolled along.

They emerged into the Casino Square. He pointed to the steps of the Rooms and the three mean little entrance doors. He pointed carelessly.

"Don't go in there again."

He felt his hand by her side seized for an instant in a nervous grip.

"Never again. I promise."

"Good," said he. Then he returned to a previous phase of thought. "I should have loved to see you playing the great game and losing a fortune. It appeals to me. It's immense."

She upturned a wistful face. "I wish to God I could do something really big—to help you."

With a wave of both arms he said: "Just be big. It's being and not doing that matters."

Her shoulders moved helplessly.

"If only I had taken the trouble to know you a year ago. I've been a fool. Things might have been so different. I should have been by your side, helping you, encouraging you, comforting you, in the way ordinary women do when their men are up against it."

"Every human being's a fool; but it doesn't do to

saturate oneself with the consciousness of it. It leads to morbidness."

They sat once more, this time on one of the benches by the circular garden, at the other end of which a nondescript seedy man was absorbed in pencilling calculations in a dirty notebook. Pandolfo said:

"Even now you haven't told me why you sent for me."

She opened her bag, as though to draw out mirror and powder-puff, and then shut it. A manœuvre for the gaining of a fraction of time.

"Surely it was enough. I was without a sou and awfully afraid. And I wanted some kind of talk with you. As far as I'm concerned, you've done infinitely more than I had hoped for. I see my way clear now, thanks to your goodness. I swear I'll not give you any more trouble than I can help."

"Are you sure you don't need me any longer?"

"Quite sure, Victor. You've eased my mind. You've given me something"—she laughed somewhat nervously —"something to live for. I'll disappear to-morrow into one of the little country places about here, Sospel, where your friend the *maître d'hôtel* comes from, and live cheaply on my twelve thousand francs and what you can afford to send me. I'll try to begin to be big by being little. You can trust me."

"I can trust you," said he gravely. He looked up at the Casino clock. "In this happy case, I can go back to London with a free mind. . . ."

She proclaimed genuine concern. This dreadful journey just for two or three hours' talk?

"Could we say more in twenty-two or twenty-three?"

He explained the delicate position of a man about to be declared bankrupt. Already he had taken a certain risk. Should she need his presence, he would take more. But

the saving of twenty-four hours was important. He would take the Blue Train, due in twenty minutes. Just time to get his bag from the Hôtel de Paris and walk down to the station. He leapt to his feet, and with an apology, left her and strode into the hotel. Presently he reappeared.

"We might be strolling down. The bag follows."

"But you haven't a berth on the Blue Train."

"That's a matter of no importance whatever," said he, enjoying, perhaps for the last time, the delightful sweets of power.

She accompanied him to the railway station. A letter shown to the *chef de train* procured bowing assurance of the utmost possible being done for his accommodation. Before mounting to the carriage, he bent down and kissed her. She flushed and looked at him somewhat bewildered. The great gleaming train of luxury moved out of the station and she waved a rag of a handkerchief to the signalling hat until it disappeared.

A heavy built man of fleshy good looks standing on the steps of the Hôtel de Paris advanced to meet her as she entered the square from the Casino Terrace.

"What's he doing here?" he asked abruptly.

"Nothing. He's just gone."

"Then what was he doing?"

"I sent for him—to tell him," she replied defiantly.

"He seems to have taken it pretty casually."

"I didn't tell him."

The man laughed in derision. "Of all the feminine contradictiousness! Thought better of it at the last minute. Well, you're wise. Let's go into the Sporting Bar and have a drink and talk it over."

"There's nothing to talk over," said Nesta, "and I'm not going into the Sporting Club."

Mr. Monte Dangerfield stuck his hands in his pockets and straddled, like Apollyon, across the way, for she would have passed out. "No, no, my dear Nesta, let us have this out. It isn't as if we were strangers. We've been excellent pals for a long time—and you know the kind of man I am. . . ."

"I certainly do," she said.

"Good. No need for frills on either side. I've made you a perfectly sound offer. I've been wanting to make it for months, but I've not had an opportunity. Now the opportunity's come. I'm a man of the world, my dear, and not a mug. And you yourself . . ."

"Better leave my description out of the story," she put in, with a glint in her eyes. "In a man of the world it's a want of tact."

She clenched her hands at the insult of his laugh, as he made rejoinder.

"Well, old girl. There's my offer. You can take it or leave it. Only you know what leaving it means. I repeat, I'm not a mug."

"You can do what you like."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

He withdrew his hands from his pockets. "Come, come," said he. "Be sensible. I know that Pandolfo hasn't a bean, and you don't care a tuppenny damn for him."

"That's where you make your mistake," she retorted, "I'd give my soul for him."

"Since when?"

"Since I made up my mind not to tell him. And now, I've had as much as I can stand. Let me pass."

"I'll give you to the end of the week, to think it over."

"You can give me till the Day of Judgment and I shan't change."

"Then you take the consequences, my dear."

He lifted his hat with ironical politeness and she hurried away.

Hours afterwards she was still sitting in her hotel room staring at the mad ruin of her life. She magnified to divine dimensions the man's vast and comprehending forgiveness. At each recurrent memory of his farewell kiss, the helpless tears streaked her face.

CHAPTER XXI

It was Spencer Babington who first brought the news to Paula, contained in a cutting or two from financial newspapers; the real story of the liquidation of The Paulinium Steel Company, Limited. All the shares of the concern had been bought up by the Chairman and Managing Director, Sir Victor Pandolfo, who henceforward was solely responsible.

"What does it mean?" she asked.

"Bedlam," said he.

He expounded to her the immunity of shareholders and even directors under the Limited Liability Companies Act. Except in case of fraud, directors, too, went off scot-free. Here there could be no charge against Pandolfo. He hated the man, she knew, his cock-sureness, his boastfulness, his way of wiping people off the earth. But to the Devil his due. About this particular devil there was a splendid craziness.

When Spencer had gone, she rang up Gregory whose time for deserting Mr. Micawber had not yet arrived. Would he dine with her? He regretted the impossibility, as Pandolfo was arriving that evening from Monte Carlo. She made a puzzled calculation.

"Why, he must have only spent a few hours there."

"You know what he is," said Gregory.

She dined alone and sat down to her writing. About ten o'clock the telephone rang. Gregory declared himself free. Pandolfo, dog-tired had gone to bed with a novel. Could he come round?

He came. She showed him the cuttings that Spencer had left. Why hadn't he told her?

"I thought you knew." The first paragraph was spite. He suspected that dreadful fellow Joram, the secretary, who naturally had lost his job. But it was contradicted immediately—the real reasons for liquidation being given. "That's why Pandolfo's going through the Bankruptcy Court," said he.

He gave her to understand that there had been a devil of a to-do. The Board of Directors, led on by the aforesaid Joram and Innwater, had conspired together to accuse him of fraudulent representation. They talked loudly of prosecution.

"The infamy of it!" cried Paula.

It was then, Gregory continued, that Pandolfo had made his indignant offer. He could only guess at the scene, not having been present, and only having learned what happened from a furiously inarticulate master. They had but to name the price they set upon their shares and he would buy them all out, paying up the extra liability per unpaid share. The shares, as Paula knew, were all privately held—not quoted—not in reach of the general public. The Board itself, including Pandolfo, held them all. As far as Gregory gathered, Pandolfo had arisen in his wrath and clubbed them right and left. Sooner poverty or death than an impugnment of his honour. He had come to them with the certainty, as far as human things can be certain, of a vast fortune. He had swept them up into the Empyrean of his vision. ("Pandolfo's words to me," said Gregory.) But above all human things was an inscrutable God—and the same God who had decreed that the revered and innocent ancestors of Mr. Mosenheim (one of the directors) should hang up their harps by the waters of Babylon, had now

closed the seam of the precious ore which was the basis of Paulinium. Who were they to defy a decree of the Almighty?

Someone—obviously a profane and atheistical person—retorted that if it hadn't been for his misplaced confidence in a notoriously untrustworthy deity, they wouldn't have lost their money. They would not lose their money, thundered Pandolfo. He himself would pay for his visions. All his life long he had caused no man the loss of a penny. He had given and not taken. ("You can hear him saying it," said Gregory.) What did they consider a fair price? One or two ("Noble fellows," said Pandolfo) were for going into liquidation as a Company and getting what they could out of the bricks and mortar of the immense Staffordshire works. But the majority decided on acceptance of Pandolfo's offer. And so, after much wrangling in which Pandolfo's solicitor, fully authorized, took a leading part—Pandolfo having grandly left the room as one who scorned the haggling ways of men—a price per share was agreed upon.

To pay them, he had sacrificed practically all that remained of his private fortune. He possessed, as far as Gregory knew, apart from his interest in former inventions, the worthless business of Paulinium, Limited, the small Bermondsey experimental factory, the Staffordshire works, his house, pictures, and cars. And his liabilities were colossal. He was filing his own petition in bankruptcy.

"My father's a shareholder," said Paula.

"The only one, then, outside the ring; but he'll be paid the fixed price." He smiled. "These things can't be done in a couple of days."

She brightened. After all her father would be able to continue to pay the interest. Then her brow clouded

again, when she recalled the details of the lunatic agreement. She shook a head lost in fog.

And Pandolfo? Apart from being dog-tired, how was he? Gregory reported a radiant and a hungry man. He was full of his experiences in the train during the preceding night. This time there was really not a vacant berth. An attendant put his own end berth at his disposal. Rob the poor fellow of his few hours' sleep? Never, Pandolfo had cried, slipping into his hand, however, the hundred francs for which he had been willing to barter his night's rest. He had sat on the seat at the end of the corridor and schemed out a new electric lift that would knock out of existence all the elevators in the universe.

"He drew diagrams on the tablecloth between mouthfuls," said Gregory.

He had drunk a glass of port—"the last of the '70 perhaps, my boy, I'll be able to allow myself"—risen, stretched himself, yawned vastly, and gone to bed with the latest novel of Monsieur Gaston Leroux. Not a word about Lady Pandolfo, save the curtest answer of conventional enquiry. She was perfectly well, enjoying the serener atmosphere of the Midi.

"He must have gone on purpose to see her," said Paula.

"Who knows, dearest of ladies, the purposes of Pandolfo?"

To both of them, the chosen and intimate disciple, and the woman around whom he had woven the spell of his vitality, he remained the Great Sphinx.

After Gregory had gone, Paula tried to construct him as a definite entity; to see him in the round, so to speak, as she could see her father, Spencer Babington, Clara Demeter, Gregory. . . . Apart from that secret and inscrutable chamber of the soul, whose mystery murderer

and saint hold in common, all these were comprehensible human beings. Their attitude towards life was obvious to the most careless observer; they trod, each in his own direction, a beaten path; for most of their actions she could predicate the motive; in any emergency she could, without claim to infallibility, predict what they would do. Her mind, instinctively psychological, and further trained by the hard experimental work that every novelist must go through in order to make men and women emerge, with some semblance of life, from the mere black print on the cold white paper, could classify them all into type categories. There were hundreds of Claras, hundreds of Spencers, hundreds of elderly ex-dragoons, hundreds—she had to confess—of Gregory Uglows. But not a conceivable pigeon-hole for Pandolfo. She could relate him with nothing in her experience. He defied the typical comparison, whereby one arrives at one's concept of another fellow-creature. She had to draw upon the past, to set up by his side the mystifying figures of the Italian Renaissance; the great princes who lived gaily under the imminent peril of the assassin, unscrupulous as every prince adventurer must be in self-defence; who gave their artistic soul to the poet or the painter and expressed the gift in lavish generosity; who, despising meanness as they despised cowardice, showed their bounty far and wide; feasted joyously on peacocks (flaunting, tail-bedecked, and imagination stirring, though damnably tough birds) and on wine drunk from golden goblets chased by artists of genius; who pulsated with all the noble emotions; while, immediately below the stone flags of the proud vaulted hall, a gentleman whom they happened to dislike sat in chains in a filthy, cold, dark dungeon, covered with sores, eaten up by vermin, munching, so as to keep another day's undesirable life in him, a

crust of mouldy bread. Pandolfo himself, swaggering over his spiritual ancestor the Great Pandolfo of Rimini, had evoked the comparison. It was true that Pandolfo would not feast callously above the tortured body of his enemy. The centuries had wiped thoughtless cruelty out of human nature. Cruelty survives as a rare vice. The old taint survived in him only as a phenomenon of reaction. Once, to hurt was an assertion of power. Pandolfo's assertion was the converse. Yet translate the magnificent and æsthetic sensuality of the Italian prince into terms of equally magnificent altruistic egotism, and you had Pandolfo, a vague figure all the same, whom she could not divest of Wardour Street trappings. That was the nearest she could get to him. And all this romantic Renaissance conception became abortive when she remarked his origin. On one side the scum of Naples; on the other the solid yeoman stock of his mother, the virtuous English housemaid in a solid English family. No, neither to type present nor past, could she relate him. He was a being apart, incalculable, fantastic, according to her standard of normality. Who could gauge his purposes?

Even now she could not comprehend his inevitable fall. He loomed before her, immense.

The next day she saw Clara Demeter, and told her of her abduction at the hands of Pandolfo and his renewed declaration of their indissoluble destinies.

Cried Clara, buxom Incarnation of Common Sense, "What's the man playing at? Is he going to divorce or kill his wife, or does he expect you to go off with him, disregarding her existence altogether?"

Paula didn't know. She must leave the solution to the future. In the meantime it behooved her to stand by his side in his hour of need.

"I could never make out whether you cared for him or whether you didn't," said Lady Demeter.

Paula clasped helpless hands on her lap. "There are times when I feel I could give up the whole world for him."

Clara hinted that, if she had acted up to this sentiment a couple of years ago, she might have avoided the present complication. Paula went away, rather sore at Clara's lack of intelligent sympathy.

At last came the public crash, the culmination of weeks of underground working. The press howled over the fall of the Great Pandolfo. It proclaimed him the world's greatest Fool. His liabilities were enormous. All his possessions were swept automatically into the administrative hands of an official.

House, pictures, furniture, cars, factories, securities, patents, all passed out of his control. He seemed, so far as Paula could understand, to be caught in an inextricable web of legal complications.

He dashed in to see her, in response to a letter of sympathy.

"Yes, I've failed. But what a colossal failure!" He was proud of it. "And it's not I"—he touched heart and brain—"that am responsible. I'm but a victim of the irony of the High Gods. This bursting of the dam that they have ordained has swept everything away for the moment. I stand up penniless, liable to criminal prosecution if I order two or three suits of clothes from my tailor. I can only enjoy the phantasmagorical grotesqueness of the situation. For daily bread I am dependent on the charity of my creditors. Perhaps not exactly that. They're ravenous for golden eggs, so they can't kill the goose. They must let me go on with my laying. But, my dear, the humour of it!"

He laughed aloud, as though the High Gods had played him the silliest trick, not realizing that before they had come to the end of their mirth, he would get the better of them.

"I've never had an invention fail in my life," he declared. "With proved material, of course. I've half a dozen roughly worked out, which the necessary concentration on Paulinium has not allowed me to perfect. I'm a free man now. I can snap my fingers at the High Gods. I am still young. I was born to fortune and the great things of the earth, and in another year or two, everything will be mine again!"

He took her by the elbows and held her with his eyes. "You believe me."

She said: "Yes, you are inconquerable."

"I'm the most hopelessly ruined man on God's earth. Do I look like it?"

She cried idiotically: "No. You look like a god."

He flung his arm round her and kissed her on the mouth.

"You're mine, as I always told you."

He drew her to the sofa, sat by her side and poured out rhapsody into her enchanted ear.

His marriage. Had she herself not analyzed the whole human conditions? There was no such thing as love between them. Yet she too, his wife, was a woman of great nature. She had offered to set him free. He had refused. Neither he nor his Paula would accept such a gift of dishonour.

She sat, her senses awakened, her mind half numbed, close by his side encircled in his embrace, her head on his shoulder. It was her first physical surrender.

"If you only had been a little patient and waited for me," she said. "I did once offer to marry you."

He started round and his grip grew tighter.

"When? Good God, when?"

She told him the history of the cable. He leaped to his feet and clasped his hands to his head. Of all the insensate fools! He deserved everything. Then he turned on Gregory. How dared he suppress the message?

"How dared he save it for you without consulting me? To have given it to you would have been monstrous."

"That's true. That's true."

He strode about the room. At last he stood before her, with his usual gesture of outstretched arms, and his face illuminated by sudden inspiration.

"Don't you see? That makes it all the more imperative. You've confessed at last."

"I suppose so," she said.

He cried triumphantly: "There's no supposition at all about it."

She smiled helplessly.

"What do you want me to do?"

"What I want is that you should defy the world and come with me and that, together, we should rebuild the great names Pandolfo and Paula. . . . In that way we can make reparation to a woman we have wronged. We can then give her her freedom."

"It seems impossible that a woman whom you married should not love you. How could she help it? Are you sure?"

"I am sure," he said. "Our life together has been a chronicle of unhappiness. My late hurried visit to her revealed to me an unsuspected nobility of character—but love—no. It's on account of that nobility that you and I must give, not she."

Only then did she realize, with startling suddenness,

the vast scope of his demand! She clapped her hands before her eyes and sprang to her feet.

"This kind of talk is horrible."

"It's frank and honest," said he, "and it's big talk—talk that the little people couldn't understand."

All the traditions of her blood rebelled; the blood of the Veresys who had for centuries been too proud to do anything significant. Sheer blood instinct spoke.

"I don't see it. Why should I be dragged through the mud, when there's a woman, on your own showing—and on hers—to whom mud doesn't matter—who's perfectly willing to give you cause—call it only technical cause . . . ?"

"She's not willing. She holds my name and her position in honour. She would sacrifice herself as an act of expiation, God forgive me for the wrong she thinks she has done me. As I said before, you and I, Victor and Paula, can't accept that. Ah no!"

He towered above her dramatically. Then, as she sat with bowed head, he yielded.

"Yes. I see that is more than I dare ask. I, too, can give technical cause without there being a breath on your fair name. Nowadays there's no need to flog a woman with a horsewhip or desert her . . . one formal offence is enough. What does the ha'porth of scandal matter to me? I'm drenched in scandal of another sort already. But all who know me, even my enemies, will recognize a technicality. No one can point at me and say 'I knew all along he was a man of dissolute life.'"

She shivered at the cold vulgarity of the proposal.

"It seems more horrid than the other idea."

He flung his arms wide: "Then what the devil are we going to do? There's only the other alternative."

A hand clasped on breast. "I'd sooner that," she said.

But when he sprang forward, after the way of men, to seal the wondrous bargain in an embrace, she thrust both hands forward to keep him off.

"Please go, Victor, please go. I must be alone to think."

He mastered her wrists.

"Thought is the curse of happiness. Anybody can think himself into hell in half an hour. I don't ask you to think. I want you to feel. That's all that matters in the world."

Her superb body grew limp and she shook an averted head.

"I wish to God I could. Let me go, please. . . . It's uncomfortable, my dear. . . . Yes, your holding me makes me rebellious. I'm a woman accustomed to freedom. There"—when he had released her—"that's better. We can talk like reasonable beings."

"I've never talked like a reasonable being in my life," he declared. "What I've been telling you now isn't reasonable. To all intents and purposes, I'm a penniless adventurer. I come to the Queen of Women and I say, 'Join with me in my fortunes to come.' It's divine unreason. But it's for you to reply."

She laughed, bewildered.

"To-morrow—or the day after—give me time to get the divine unreason into my head."

She stood before him in an attitude of dismissal both commanding and imploring. He could not but obey.

"I'll come for your answer to-morrow," he said.

CHAPTER XXII

He came the next day, splendid, confident. His presence vivified the flat's dead atmosphere. For Paula had spent a sleepless night, torn this way and that. In his fall the man loomed more vast than at the zenith of his fortunes. She knew that if he had picked her up in his arms, in true Troglodyte fashion and carried her away no matter where, her limbs would have been as water, her will as air, and her veins as fire. But civilization had its manifest drawbacks. In the first place, such things aren't done nowadays, except in a certain type of French novel; in the second, even a man of such robust physique as Pandolfo would have found grotesque embarrassment in transporting bodily, no matter whither, an upstanding and largely built woman like herself. Had she been a skimpy scrag of a hungry cat, modern woman's apparent ideal of the perfect woman, entirely alien to any man, ancient or modern, it would have been a different matter; and thirdly—her essential Puritanism boggled at the contemplation of things robbed of a savagely romantic setting. Between primitive caves and Sloane Street yawned the unbridgeable chasm. She had to translate wild and elemental emotion into coagulated terms of Chadford Park and Harrod's Stores, which is a very difficult and sleep-dispelling thing to do. She was as limp as yesterday's daffodils which drooped forlornly over the sides of the vase.

And then came Pandolfo, and all was changed. Even the daffodils lifted their heads in delight.

"I've done my life's greatest work," he cried. "I

didn't tell you yesterday, because only last night was it accomplished."

Her heart leaped and laughed.

"What have you done now?"

He was like a boy who might have burst in on her with the news of his winning a school championship.

"I've breathed the breath of life into that dried praying-mantis of a Spencer Babington. That mortgage on Chadford Park—you remember?—It was one of my securities—a source of income. It had to go into the melting-pot together with everything else."

The vague apprehension at the back of her mind, ever since her father's visit, developed into the clarity of a great fear. She stammered something about foreclosure. Yes, said he, that was the point. He had sworn to him that Chadford should not pass into vulgar hands. To keep his oath had been one of his main preoccupations. He had taken the only way. Trustees in Bankruptcy, Official Receivers, were but intellectual machines. He instanced a recent play: Robots. Mechanical soulless beings. Though, in their private lives sensitive, delicate, shrinking humans, they may drive their women-folk to despair by finding compensating merit in a drunken cook and weep over the discomforts of a worm, yet in their official capacity one beat of human sympathy would cost them their job. The unfortunate bankrupt could no more wring their hearts than he could stop an express train by a kiss. Creditors must be paid and to pay them the debtor's property must be sold, or administered. Did she see the point? The Court then was administering a mortgage on which the mortgagee could not pay the interest. Did it shed tears over Mr. Veresy's plight? No. The obvious thing was foreclosure, the sale of Chadford Park, and the handing over to Mr. Veresy of

the difference between the sale money and the amount of the mortgage. It would take some time—the law's delay had a quality of beneficence—— But they would be done, in the course of bureaucratic time with the inevitability of fate.

"So I go to Spencer Babington. I say in effect: 'You are as rich as God allows English gentlemen to be nowadays; you are a bachelor; you've no ties except a sister who has married an American millionaire and a nephew who waggles a red flag somewhere down in Houndsditch and whom you've resolved to disinherit in any case. What are you going to do with your money?' No matter what he replied. I went on: 'You say you love Paula Field.' It took me a quarter of an hour to make him admit it. That kind of man thinks it's as indecent to talk about the secrets of his heart as about the secrets of his bath. Anyway I got him going. 'You've loved her for years,' I said. 'Except asking her to marry you, whereby you would be the infinite gainer, what the devil have you ever done for her? Here's a chance to escape from the dead ruck of egoism, and prove your love for her. If you let Chadford Park go, it's obvious you don't care a hang for a thing that matters to her more than life.' He asked me how I had the impertinence to talk to him like that." Pandolfo laughed. "You know I can use any insolence to get what I want. What could be easier for him than to guarantee the interest and take over the mortgage, if need be? Do you know that he turned the tables on me? Why hadn't I told him the bare facts? My references to his egoism were intolerable. If ever there was a man less actuated by selfish motives, it was he. Had he known the circumstances, he would have come forward at once. He put on his noblest air and held out his eyeglass to me, between finger and thumb. He would give

his life for you. A few tens of thousand pounds were nothing—— So," Pandolfo went on, "I've kept my word. The Veresys shall continue to live in Chadford Park."

Great as was her joy at the alleviation of her fears, she felt a cold grip of the heart. The transaction that he had described contained an element of that incomprehensibility of the man which had always repelled her. He had forced Spencer Babington to take over the mortgage through sheer sentimental blackmail. He gloried in his achievement, seeing nothing of the poor delicacies which he had trampled under foot. It was as though some sweet part of her had been the subject of a bargain between two men.

He noticed her air of preoccupation, and said in surprised disappointment:

"I thought you'd be delighted."

She smiled. "Of course I am. The terror of my father's life was to live in a little flat in Putney. I've told him over and over again that quite the best people live in flats in Putney. It's the distinguished thing to do. But he won't believe me. He'll be happy. Only, he's worried about the interest. You see, a mortgage is an investment like any other. Somebody would have taken it over, so why not Spencer? But he would expect a return on his capital, wouldn't he?"

"The buyer in the ordinary market—yes."

"But can you see Spencer Babington giving anything for nothing?"

"I can see him coming to an honourable agreement with your father."

"My father has had enough of such agreements. Oh, I don't reproach you for your generosity. Heaven knows

I don't. But you threw dust in his eyes. You must admit that. Spencer hasn't got your magic. . . . And my father's a proud man and is not going to live on anyone's charity."

Pandolfo laughed. "Is that what you're afraid of? But—am I not always here?"

"I don't quite understand," she said.

He burst into impetuous speech. As long as he was alive, wasn't his life in itself a guarantee? He could give no bond to Babington, securing payment of interest, for that would be illegal. He wasn't quite sure whether it wouldn't be a felony, to expiate which he would have to wear horrible clothes and feed off cocoa and shin of beef. But between honourable men words were as binding as documents. Didn't she see? Why, it was simplicity itself.

"Do you suppose that I, Victor Pandolfo, with my brain and my power won't remake my fortune in a year or two? I have dozens of inventions pigeon-holed, just waiting for the opportunity to be brought out. I have a new one that will revolutionize the working of lifts the world over. As I stand before you, I am potential wealth. Not money, in the vulgar sense. But wealth, power to give and to do and to spread all that there is of myself about the world."

She shook her head.

"Egoist."

"Why not?" He thumped his chest, with both hands. "When one is blest with an ego like mine, why not develop it to its full for the good of humanity at large?"

She smiled at his conception of himself as the monstrous altruist.

"But, supposing," she said, after a while, "that Spencer

accepts your guarantee as to the interest, where does my father come in? He would be no more beholden to you than to Spencer."

"But, my dearest of dear women," cried Pandolfo, "where are your wits? Babington is but a passing phantom. I am the reality. Mr. Veresy has but to view all this mortgage business in the light of marriage settlement on you and where is the obligation?"

He stood before her bankrupt, penniless, luminous, commanding the earth; dazing her by the lightning presentation of the scheme which to him appeared clear-cut, indefectible; claiming her, as always, for his own, by indefeasible right. Again she felt the old dread of him.

"You call Spencer a phantom. Haven't you used him rather as a cat's paw?"

"Are such men good for anything else? It's their justification for existence. I've made him think he's doing a noble action. It'll be good for his soul. He'll live on it for the rest of his life."

"So, according to you, you're still giving. You're giving Spencer the opportunity of doing, as you call it, a noble action."

"That's casuistry," he declared, with his gesture sweeping away argument. "Didn't I tell you the first time I met you that your wit was keener than mine? We come now to the big essentials. I have laid all my cards on the table—everything I can think of as being me—my past, my present, my future. All my certainties of existence. You told me yesterday to come for your answer. What is it?"

The telephone rang in the dining-room, cutting for a second the intensity of the situation.

"My maid's there," she said impatiently.

"Your answer."

She rose and said somewhat wildly: "How do I know? How do I know? You're always putting me in a false position. You've appealed to me in every way that a man can appeal to woman—except one. Except pity——"

"Pity?"

He threw the humiliating sentiment into the air.

The maid entered. Mr. Uglow would like to speak to Sir Victor. It was important.

"You permit me? These are times when one must bow to necessity. And Gregory's discretion——"

She sat alone. The splendid man commanded her. There was nothing but surrender.

He came in after his brief talk over the wires.

"I must go. Gregory read me a telegram just received. My wife dangerously ill at Dover. Lord Warden Hotel. I am summoned at once. Can I do otherwise than obey?"

She said: "Mere humanity."

"Of course."

He pulled out his watch: "The four o'clock boat train. I have just time." He had given Gregory hurried instructions. Fate only allowed him a few more moments with her. What this sudden illness meant he could not imagine. He had left her in Monte Carlo in perfect health. And the telegram said, "dangerously ill." It was a matter of life and death. Paula smiled at his implied pleading.

"Of course you must go."

She put out a hand. "Good-bye. This makes further talk between us impossible for the time being, doesn't it?"

"I suppose it does," said he.

When he had gone, she sat in the little dainty drawing-room, staring at the future as she had done so many times

before. He had left the dining-room door open, after coming from the telephone, and her eye caught the gleam of the Paulinium Perseus in its corner. Once more it summed up in her mind the history of the extravagant being who held her in the meshes of his will; the heredity of his plaster-cast conception; his illimitable ambition; the tastelessness of his achievement. She rose and shut the door, on pretext of draught, and drew up a chair close to the fire.

The woman was dangerously ill. Her death would solve the abominable problem of his regained freedom. She shivered as though the imps of all the Indelicacies alien to her traditions were drawing around her and touching her with unclean fingers. . . . In the great things of life he stood an unassailable rock. Dishonour, disloyalty, cruelty, ungenerosity to the woman whom, through her own wretched fault, he had made his wife, were inconceivable. His Monte Carlo story was true. He would not stain his own conception of himself with lies. It was in the little things, the little things that mattered so infinitely, that he failed. The vulgarity of the arranged divorce. Her friends did it every day; but that didn't atone for its essential vulgarity. And the Spencer Babington affair, showing a bluntness of fine susceptibility. And then, his defiance of misfortune. Ajax defying the lightning. The remembered tag produced a sense of anticlimax, bathos. If only he had come to her as the broken man, broken in fortune, broken in ambition, broken in the sweeter of life's hopes. . . . She salved a tormented conscience with specious balm. He would have none of her pity. Yet, for that reason, was he not all the greater a human being? Thoughts and emotions coursed in a vicious circle. Would it not have been better to join him in his proud downfall, justifying herself

as the great woman of his unwavering faith and proclamation, and snap her fingers at the little world wherein Clara Demeter, for instance, had her being? Clara Demeter—she choked with a sobbing laugh—why—it was quite on the cards that she would ask them down to Hinsted as a splendid pair of unconventionally assorted lions and get a job-lot of deans, dowagers, cabinet ministers and ambassadors to meet them. If only she had had the courage. The man was worth all her bravery. He bestrode—and this time the tag struck just—this narrow world like a Colossus. At a word, he could have swept her up, equally magnificent by his side. . . . She had come so near surrender.

And now, he was gone. She felt in her soul an undercurrent of relief; a sense of respite. The woman who stood between them was dangerously ill. Thus she came back to the point of the circle whence she had started. To speculate on the chances of the woman living or dying was a ghastly and gross indecency.

At five o'clock her maid announced a chattering woman whom she had forgotten she had asked to tea. The chattering woman, fresh from the Riviera, entertained her with accounts of Lady Pandolfo's enormous losses at Monte Carlo.

Pandolfo drove home in a taxi-cab. The vast limousine had already gone into the Trustee's melting pot, and his tenure of the home in Tite Street was limited to the immediate future. Gregory met him with the telegram. It read: "Very dangerously ill." The qualifying word had been lost over the wires. It was worse than he had thought.

He took his packed bag, and drove to Victoria.

On the way down to Dover he stared out of the win-

dow, but the panorama of the tender spring passed him unheeded. A far different woman from the one who had caused him his last journey on that familiar route now awaited him. A woman with newly revealed greatness that had awakened his admiration. A woman who had struck a responsive chord in his adventurer's heart by her splendid though disastrous bid for fortune. A woman who, confessing herself a courtesan, had offered to make the only amends in her power; in her way, the offering of the Juggler of Notre Dame or of Boule de Suif in the immortal stories. Before that meeting in Monte Carlo he had never known her. Disillusion and sense of wrong and all the masculine indignations had blinded him to any finer qualities that she might possess. He had forgiven her, if forgiveness were necessary, by that parting kiss. No love, of course, lingered. But there persisted respect for a personality. And pity. She was very dangerously ill. Like Paula, he rejected, with horror, the indecency of thinking of her death.

He mounted the steps of the Lord Warden, once the most romantic hostelry in England (for was it not there that, in the long ago, when packets were rough-and-tumble affairs and the crossing to Calais an unromantic business to be undertaken in dreadful separation from the beloved, that honey-mooning couples bound for continental travel broke their journey, and surrendered to its quaint traditions?), but nowadays a well-conducted but glamourless hotel of passage, and having given his name to the hall porter was immediately shown into the Manager's room. He waved the telegram:

"My wife—Lady Pandolfo? What is the matter?"

"We received a telephone message from your house," said the manager, "notifying us that you would arrive by

this train. I asked Dr. Warrender to be here to meet you."

He turned to another man and made perfunctory introductions, with the air of an hotel keeper relieved of responsibility, and left the two together.

The doctor, a middle-aged heavy man, with a professional manner, looked at Pandolfo with an appraising eye.

"I'd better be frank. Lady Pandolfo is suffering from an overdose of veronal."

"Good God!" said Pandolfo, passing his hand over his forehead. Then: "Are you really frank, or are you trying to break bad news to me?"

"She's still alive, unconscious of course. Unfortunately I was called in rather late. No fault of the management. Her door was locked and it was only at noon, when getting no reply to knocking, that they broke in. I ventured to take charge of this letter addressed to you which I found under her pillow."

Pandolfo tore open the envelope.

The letter was brief:

"My Dear Victor,—

"This is the only clean way out. I have never given anything to anybody in my life. And now the only thing I have in the world to give you is your freedom. The only thing I ask of you, who have given me so much, is that you should think as kindly as you can of your

"Nesta."

Pandolfo put the letter in his pocket. "It is merely a line," said he, "to explain her reason for staying in Dover, instead of coming straight home. She had been sleepless for many nights. The state of my affairs has naturally caused her much anxiety. Before plunging into them, she wished to have a good night's rest."

"Quite so," said the doctor gravely. "Was she in the habit of taking veronal?"

"She has suffered from insomnia since infancy," declared Pandolfo.

Suddenly a nerve seemed to snap in his brain, almost with the vibration of a fiddle-string. He dropped into the manager's swivel-chair and buried his face in his hands, his elbow resting on the desk. He had no use for this silly doctor with his silly questions. There was nothing but one great Fact before him. The doctor looked at him for a few seconds and then slipped out. He returned with a glass of brandy.

"Better drink this," said he, with a hand on his shoulder.

Pandolfo's pride revolted at his momentary weakness. He pushed the glass aside and sprang to his feet.

"I must go up and see her. She can't be left alone like this."

The doctor smiled. "She's not alone, Sir Victor. I sent in a nurse at once."

Pandolfo waved a hand. She must have as many nurses as he thought fit. The best nursing home in Dover, if need be. The resources of the earth.

"She has got to live, do you understand that? She has got to live."

The doctor expressed the hope that she would. Everything possible had been done. Assembled Harley Street could do no more.

The letter was a fire before his eyes, blazing with the supreme sacrifice of a human soul. It was marvellous yet monstrous. It staggered thought. Such a sacrifice he could not accept. She must live. Eternal Justice must put a veto on her death.

He paced the small office. Halted to the consciousness

of the doctor's dry report. Of course it was natural that he should wish to see Lady Pandolfo. The doctor was at his service, but she lay unconscious—— Perhaps, after all, it would be more satisfactory. . . . The lift took them up to the third floor. They entered the room. A nurse in uniform sat by the bed where lay the drugged and pallid woman. Pandolfo looked down on his wife. Her features seemed very pure and girlish; her body faintly outlined by the bed clothes, but the wisp of a fragile thing. His heart swelled with an immense pity.

The doctor put some questions to the nurse, examined the pulse and eyes of the patient. Pandolfo watched him and the sweat stood on his forehead. The doctor turned. Humanly speaking, she would recover. It was a question of waiting, watching and nursing. He forecast the ordinary stages. The awakening to a half consciousness; the succeeding sleep; the gradual recovery of memory and reason. With a dry professional smile he gave hope and counselled patience. Unless summoned earlier on unexpected emergency, he would call again about nine o'clock.

Pandolfo sat by the bed while the nurse told him all she knew. Lady Pandolfo had arrived the previous afternoon from Monte Carlo, having telegraphed for a room. The labels on her luggage proclaimed Dover and not Victoria as her destination. She had come down to dinner; had sat awhile in the lounge and then gone upstairs, when she had given orders not to be disturbed until she rang for breakfast in the morning. At noon they found her unconscious with an empty phial of veronal tablets by her side. Shortly afterwards, summoned by the doctor, the nurse had taken up her duties. She strove to comfort the stricken husband. She had seen cases of veronal poisoning before. In every instance, when the pulse had lasted out all those hours, the patient had re-

covered. She put his simple mind at ease with regard to her possible suspicions.

"People who aren't accustomed to veronal don't know what a dangerous thing it is. They haven't slept for a few nights—they've heard of veronal—they go and get a bottle and take ten times too much. And the result——"

She motioned to the bed.

"She must be very pretty," she remarked.

"Yes; a very pretty woman," he answered vaguely.

Then, the figure lying so tragically still, he questioned anxiously:

"Are you quite certain?"

The nurse, to humour him, put her skilled hand on the patient's pulse, and nodded reassurance.

"She mustn't die. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't bear it," he repeated, with a gesture suggestive of the fall of Heaven if his Atlas strength should fail.

Again she comforted him. At last, using her authority, she turned him out of the sick room.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE woman who had passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death wept helplessly when she awoke to find that she had journeyed back to her starting point. She made no pretence of ignorant taking of veronal. She had deliberately sought to end a life which she, of her own doing, had rendered intolerable. She moaned piteously. Why did they drag her back? Those few moments of semi-consciousness before the deep descent into Nirvana had been the most exquisite of her life. Why hadn't they let her die? She had gone through it all for nothing. What kind of a thing was the new life that stretched drearily before her?

She was very weak, very tired, her drugged brain as yet only awakened to the major fact of an unutterable disappointment. She cried piteously: "Tell me what I can do to go back."

This was in the early hours of the spring morning. Dawn already slanted through curtain edges across the room. Pandolfo called from bed appeared summarily clad. He knelt down and kissed her hand. Her fingers strayed to his face.

"I did it all for the best." Her voice came faint as from one in another world. "It was the only way out. The only way out——" she repeated the terms of her letter. "I couldn't go to Monte Dangerfield. You made it impossible. . . . You made me love you at last. It was the only way. And now don't let Monte come near me—until I'm better—I suppose I must get better. . . ."

Her voice trailed off into an incoherent murmur. The

nurse standing by with restraining authority, whispered to Pandolfo:

"Say nothing."

He obeyed, for the sick woman had fallen again into stupor. He watched with the nurse in the grey broadening light, until the doctor came at a telephone summons. Doctor and nurse bent over the bed and whispered. Pandolfo stood in a corner of the room by the drawn curtain of a window that commanded a view of the Castle and the harbour, feeling for the first time in his life, the least significant being on earth. They did things, he knew not what. Their forms loomed between him and Nesta. He stared out of the window. Once before, during the war, he had stood by some such window in that hotel and watched the dawn creep over the Channel which he was to cross on a given signal, with a mystery of his own making in his hands. He had stood there, wearing blue uniform with funny gold braid. Within half an hour he must pass out into the silence of the dawn, and board the waiting Destroyer that would take him and his mystery whither he knew not. The memory of the then exquisite poignancy of that watch by the window held him spell-bound. Those were days when a man ventured not only his life but his brain. His life, as that of a working, sleeping, eating human entity—what did it matter? Thousands were being sacrificed daily. Cannon-food, fish-food, what you willed. As a mere breathing creature his value in the cosmos was scarcely more than a gnat's. A bullet in the head or an overgulp of salt water and that would be the end of him as a physical being. The uncognizant world would barely record his vanishing. His life! He had snapped contemptuous fingers. But his brain, holding that which was to bring succour to thousands of men in peril, was a different affair altogether. It

could not be replaced by any strange grey matter on the earth. For that he had held life precious as he stood there watching into the dawn.

A touch on his arm aroused him from these reflections. The doctor was by his side. With a great pang he read the message in the man's eyes.

His wife was dead.

Pandolfo asked later: "Did anyone see the letter you gave me?"

The doctor said no. He had taken it from beneath her pillow.

"Could it be," asked Pandolfo, "that such a letter was never found and handed to me? Indeed, as I said, it was but an unimportant note which I have torn up."

"There need be no letter, unless I have to give sworn evidence," said the doctor.

"What was the final cause of death?"

"Failure of the heart's action, of course."

"Then you can give a certificate?"

"A guarded one."

"Who is there," said Pandolfo sadly, "to question it?"

He stayed in Dover, where Gregory joined him, until the poor lady had been put to rest for ever in the Dover cemetery. The lesser newspapers, in view of his fall, gave what ungenerous details they could scrape together, for sensational copy. Lady Pandolfo, the wife of the well-known inventor, Sir Victor Pandolfo, whose affairs were now in bankruptcy, had only lately startled even the imperturbable world of Monte Carlo by her enormous losses at the table. She had been a familiar figure in the world of amusement. She was the daughter of a late Canon of Ely and had made a runaway marriage with the Comte de Bréville, a man well-known in Paris fashionable

circles. . . . All the non-libellous insinuations in the stereotyped language of the lower journalist. The story of the romantic shipboard courtship and the Rio Janeiro marriage was set out with more or less exactitude. And now, the sudden death in a Dover hotel was headlined in one foul print as "The Tragic End of a Life of Pleasure."

Pandolfo cast the paper from him:

"If only I were God!" he cried impotently.

"In two days' time, who will remember?" asked Gregory.

"I shall remember," said Pandolfo.

The young man looked at the convulsed features of his master and benefactor and for the first time became afraid. His sensitiveness conjectured that the grand man's impregnable egoism had been pierced and that he was suffering intolerable agony. And presently his conjecture received vivid confirmation.

"The swine! To say that of a woman who gave more than I had ever dreamed of giving."

Eventually he calmed down. To Gregory he seemed to grow humble, docile. Instead of taking command in the last miserable formalities, he left them to Gregory. The heart had gone out of him. Gregory was mystified, in spite of his sensitive conjecture. . . . On the way back from the graveside, it might have been the husband of a wife preciously cherished who sat by him silent and almost broken.

Paula had written, in reply to the telegram announcing Nesta's death. It had been a mind-tearing, sense-rending letter to write. As yet, of course, no idea of the cause had entered her brain. The woman who stood between them was dead. There was now no barrier except of her

own making. No more the alternation between the Great Defiance and the shiveringly vulgar compromise of the Divorce Court. The woman was dead. And yet, for the moment at any rate, death yawned between them, an indecent gulf. In writing the letter, the traditions of her race came to her aid. She fenced herself round with convention. She planted herself firmly at the terrifying cross-roads.

She longed for, yet dreaded his coming. He had the power, at once to carry her away from the self that the centuries had made her, the fine product of gentle and cultured generations, to appeal sometimes irresistibly to all kinds of wild emotions, primitive impulses, visionary enthusiasms and to put a rough and scornful hand on all the delicate and vital tendrils of her being whereby she thought she lived.

Clara Demeter came to her.

"Now, my dear, what the devil are you going to do?"

"If you worry me any more," said Paula, "I'll marry Spencer Babington, who has just made arrangements to take over that nightmare of a mortgage and let my father down easily. He has already made me his fiftieth proposal."

"Mortgage? Spencer? What's it all about?"

In desperation Paula told her.

"Don't you see, you're all driving me crazy? Spencer, at last has got hold of the most gentlemanly and diplomatic and sentimental chance of blackmail in the world. My father was here yesterday. Spencer had got at him. Why wouldn't I marry Spencer? A man of a family as good as our own. Tons of money——"

She described the scene between the two men, as reported by Mr. Veresy.

"If she'll accept, I'll do an unheard of thing. I'll change my name. I'll get letters-patent and call myself Veresy-Babington."

"Why not the other way about? Babington-Veresy?"

They had argued like idiots, without coming to any decision. At last it occurred to them that Paula would have something to say in the matter. In fact, it depended entirely on her.

"If she'll have me as Veresy-Babington," said Spencer, "I'll forego the interest for the rest of your life, on the condition that you make over the remainder-values to us jointly by will. Myrtilla, of course, you will provide for."

"And if she won't have you?" asked Mr. Veresy.

"We'll have to come to some purely business arrangement, my dear fellow," said Spencer. "I'm more or less in honour bound to take over the mortgage. But also in honour you're not the man to accept something for nothing."

"So you see, my dear girl," said Mr. Veresy to Paula, "I'm in a hell of a cleft stick."

He sang the praises of Spencer and cursed Pandolfo as the greatest charlatan adventurer that a pusillanimous world had left unhung. It had been a torturing interview for Paula. She had carried Mr. Veresy off to the Delaneys whither she was bidden for lunch and had sent him off, surfeited with meat and wine and Tory-istic assurances that the British Empire was going to eternal blazes in the next six months, and very hazily aware of her matrimonial intentions.

She repeated to Lady Demeter:

"Don't you see you're all driving me crazy? I wish to Heaven you'd leave me alone."

Clara laughed in her comfortable way.

"What I really came for was to carry you down to Hinsted for a few days' rest."

"Then why begin by worrying me?" asked Paula.

Clara promised not to breathe a disturbing syllable. This time Hinsted was to be real rest. Not a soul to be invited for the next week-end in view of Demeter's gout and general sorrow for himself.

"You're the only creature in the world Frank would care to have. You can hold each other's hands all day long."

"You're only doing this out of sheer kindness," said Paula, "you think—and perhaps rightly——"

"No matter what I think," laughed Lady Demeter. "It'll be good for you."

So when Pandolfo returned to London, he found a note from Paula telling him of her Hinsted visit. Gregory still saw him anxious, preoccupied, as though grief-stricken at the loss of the wife whom he had never loved. He opened the letter in the young man's presence, who recognized the familiar handwriting on the envelope, and no gleam of pleasure lit his gloomy face. He glanced through one or two other letters and then bade Gregory ring up a man called Montague Dangerfield—a company promoter of sorts who must have offices in the city. Gregory frowned, seeking some lost association with the name. At last he found it. Paula Field had mentioned the man, during their confidential talks, in connection with her father's unfortunate speculations. Vaguely too he had heard of him otherwise. He knew that Pandolfo was in need of money to float his reserve of inventions. Why go to Dangerfield? He ventured:

"I don't think he's a man with the best of reputations."

"That's the very reason I want to get into touch with him," said Pandolfo.

Gregory looked up the address in the telephone book and called the number. They sat as usual on opposite sides of the long table.

"I've got them," said Gregory.

"Say that I want to have an immediate interview with Mr. Dangerfield."

Gregory listened and reported: "He's returning from Monte Carlo this evening and will be at the office tomorrow morning."

"Say that I'll call on him at eleven o'clock."

Gregory gave the message, hooked up the receiver. Pandolfo sat silent with heavy brow. At last he spoke.

"The man has a private address I suppose." He reached for the open book, and found an address in Mount Street. "I don't think I can wait. I'll try to see him this evening."

Gregory stared. That Pandolfo should change his mind in a few minutes was an unprecedented phenomenon.

"Mrs. Field has gone down to Hinsted," he said, presently, as though speaking to himself. "Perhaps it's better so. I've got to straighten all this out first."

At nine o'clock, Pandolfo was shown into the gaily furnished drawing-room of a Mount Street flat. The manservant informed him that Mr. Dangerfield was just finishing dinner, but would join him in a moment or two. Pandolfo glanced mechanically around. The connoisseur's eye detected the non-genuineness of some old colour-prints. On a pretentious pseudo-buhl cabinet stood a pre-war Viennese group of statuary. Signed photographs of women in heavy silver frames were set

about the room. In a corner a stuffed bear upheld a lamp. Some numbers of "Form at a Glance" were neatly terraced on a table. A tasteless oil-painting of a race-horse threw the colour-prints out of scale. A fire burned below a great Italian chimney-piece.

Monte Dangerfield, fresh from bath and food and prosperous-looking in blue velvet smoking jacket entered suddenly, with apologetic greetings.

"My dear Sir Victor. . . . So sorry to keep you waiting. . . ."

Pandolfo took no notice of the hand held out.

"I suppose you know that my wife is dead."

The other made a gesture. "Alas, yes. My deep condolences. . . . Indeed it was a great shock. So sudden."

"Yes. Very sudden," said Pandolfo. "No—I'd rather stand, if you don't mind. You were a friend of my wife's?"

"I had that privilege."

"You saw something of her lately in Monte Carlo."

Before replying, Dangerfield opened a gold cigarette box, offered it to Pandolfo who motioned it away, and lit a cigarette himself. Then he looked at Pandolfo through narrowed eyes.

"I don't see any reason for beating about the bush like this," he said bluntly. "I can see what you've come for. In a few days' time I'd have had to come to you myself. Yes, I saw a good deal of Lady Pandolfo in Monte Carlo. . . . Well, we've got at it quick, at any rate. What are you going to do about it?"

"About what?"

"Why the cheque—the dishonoured cheque."

"What cheque?"

"Don't tell me you don't know?" He made a turn about the room, then faced Pandolfo. "Well, don't

blame me, my dear fellow. You've brought it on yourself." He drew a letter case from his breast-pocket and from it a cheque which he held up. "I was fully intending to allow a decent interval—but I can't afford to lose a thousand pounds."

"A thousand pounds," said Pandolfo.

"Look."

He held out the cheque before Pandolfo's eyes. A dishonoured cheque on her own bank payable to Monte Dangerfield.

"Lady Pandolfo was losing heavily one evening. She came to me. They wouldn't change her cheques. The word had gone round about your—your difficulties—you'll forgive me mentioning it. We exchanged cheques and mine, for eighty-five thousand francs, known to be good anywhere in the world—she gave the barman as security and drew upon it. Her cheque came back to me as you see."

"I see," said Pandolfo. "Why didn't you communicate with me at once?"

"Surely, in the first place, it was a matter between myself and Lady Pandolfo. I gave her time to make arrangements, with or without your knowledge. That did not concern me."

"May I ask what you proposed to do in case you could come to no—arrangement with Lady Pandolfo?"

"I should have come to you, as you force me to do at the present moment."

The man with his veneer of good-breeding and his logic disputable only on unmentionable grounds, held him at a disadvantage. To have flown at his throat and otherwise overwhelmed him with fury would have been merely to traduce the honour of the dead woman. He had only the inference from her dying words to go upon. Besides, he

felt no fury. The fountains of his splendid impulses seemed to have dried at the source. He felt dull and powerless.

"You must take my word that eventually the amount shall be repaid in full, with interest. But you appreciate my present position. It was owing to an unfortunate misunderstanding, for which I am responsible, that Lady Pandolfo drew the cheque. My lawyer will write you to that effect and invite you to lodge your claim as a creditor against my estate."

"That will be perfectly satisfactory," said Monte Dangerfield politely. "But," he went on, throwing his cigarette into the fire, and putting his hands into his smoking-jacket pockets, "may I ask you a question? If you were ignorant of the existence of this returned cheque, to what do I owe, as they say, the honour of your visit?"

"I just wanted to look at you," replied Pandolfo. "We can leave it at that." He cast a contemptuous glance around the vulgar room. "You needn't ring. I can find my way out. Good night."

A touch of the conqueror inspired his steps down the carpeted stairs. But it vanished as he emerged into the bleakness of the raw spring night. For the first time in his life he suffered the humiliation of defeat, and his steps were clogged with leaden weights. A taxi took him to the house which now was only his on sufferance; which, with its contents, already inventoried, would be sold over his head, in the slow but certain course of the Law's authority. When, passing down from the hall, he came to the dining-room door, he opened it, put on the lights and surveyed the cold perfection of the museum-like room which even Nesta's febrile taste had not been able to alter. Every picture, every article of furniture had its honourable and undisputed pedigree. It was the tri-

umph of one man's sure taste and scholarship. Different from the tawdry insolence of the room he had just left. Just as he, Pandolfo, was different from that room's urbane and insolent possessor. And this was no longer his. God knows where that little gem of a Parmigiano would go to. He had bought it at Jebusa Crowe's sale. . . . Jebusa Crowe who must now be approaching the end of his seven years' sentence. What would the poor devil do when he came out? The personality of Jebusa Crowe had never occurred to him before as a subject for speculation. If he, himself, had not been able to stand the racket, mightn't he now be treading the course of the wretched Jebusa? For a year, like Jebusa, he had buoyed up everyone with unfulfillable hopes. Deep down in himself he had known they were unfulfillable. . . .

His next move would be to some cheap suburban house . . . he had heard of one at Norwood with a disused stable that would be turned into a laboratory. . . .

Till now he had not cared, confident in the star that would maintain him hovering supreme over the petty mischances of fate. He turned out the lights of the dining-room and went upstairs to bed, with dragging footsteps, a beaten giant.

Yet the instinct of his blind purpose in visiting this inconsiderable man had been justified. He had come away with the solution of a worrying enigma. It was for this desperate trouble of the dishonoured cheque that Nesta had summoned him. For the first time he had spoken frankly of his real position. There had been that bizarre stripping of souls over the commonplace luncheon-table. Her proposed sacrifice had been met with vehement repudiation. Some chord within the woman, whose magnificent gambling with life had won his admiration, had

been struck by his careless hand. Womanlike—or what, on his crude conception of feminine psychology stood for womanlike—she had confessed all but the essential. Why? To save him, Pandolfo, from an anxiety which to her mind working naturally in a smaller sphere, would be the last straw of torture. She must pay the price to the smooth blackmailing devil or take the other way out. And why did she shrink from the price? Because she loved him. Something had happened, he knew not what. In the two or three hours of their talk she had undergone a subtle change. . . . The woman who had tripped down the Casino steps and met him with her gambling story of twelve thousand francs and the woman whom he had kissed, in his vast protective way at Monte Carlo station, were two different women. . . . Even then she had made her great resolve. . . .

He lay long awake staring at his picture of the woman's soul. If she had decided on the way out, why did she not take it at once? The answer came that the staunchest of human beings hold themselves back on the brink of death. She must have tried to reason with the wolf . . . she had failed. What threats he had held over her he was never to know. . . . Again, why take the long journey to Dover in order to commit an act easily commissable in Monte Carlo? The answer came that her death abroad would require of him much travel and foreign complication. That she would spare him. A London hotel-room would entail vain gossip. Dover was near enough to save him from over-trouble and was a natural halting place for a weary traveller. . . . Her practical mind had worked out the details of his salvation as far as she could secure it. From the day of their parting, he had been the centre of her existence. She had not taken her life in a sudden fit of panic or despair.

She had done it deliberately, of set purpose, out of her new love for him, to repair whatever wrongs she had done him, to give him back his freedom and assure his happiness.

He, who all his life had given and even when taking was eager to prove that he was giving all the time, had been given that for which there was no return. His egoism lay crushed under the weight of the gift.

CHAPTER XXIV

He wrote to Paula: "Forgive me if I do not seek to see you for the moment. It is not that I love you less or am more sufficient unto myself. The contrary is the case. But a cloud has settled over my soul which only time can dispel. I can't yet see how to walk clearly; and before you I must walk in the full light of day."

Paula, a million miles from the truth, was baffled. That a veil of reverence should be drawn over the dead was natural and decorous. But between the veil of decorum and the cloud enveloping a man's soul lay a psychological gulf which she could not bridge.

He had spoken, it is true, of his wife's nobility in offering. But is there a woman alive who does not discount a man's chivalry towards other women? Especially such a man as Pandolfo. Above all things he was a Romantic. A Romantick with a k—she remembered her Rênes-les-Eaux conception of him as Cecco of the Burning Coal. She had only the equipment of her knowledge of facts wherewith to judge the situation. Prima facie it bordered ever so slightly on the absurd. Unless there were factors of which she was ignorant; love for this woman breaking into flame after her death. If so, his late protestations were monstrous. She suffered pangs of a jealousy which she despised. After all, romantick, perfervid, unheeding centrifugal force that he was, at any rate she had detected in him never a note of insincerity. He swept forward in the direct course of his convictions and his passions. He was ever actuated by his Faith, no

matter how childish. No man held in greater scorn the subtlety of intrigue, thereby being the polar opposite of Spencer Babington, centripetal egoist, to whom it was the breath of his being.

For a while she sought, as she had grown into an intolerable habit of doing, to leave the matter on the knees of the High Gods. But somehow the High Gods, finally impatient, tossed the matter from them, repudiating responsibility. The problem of her life must be solved, once and for all, one way or the other. She must take his direct course. He had unceasingly proclaimed her greatness. She burned at the realization that never had she exhibited to him anything but her littleness. She must go to him and compel his emergence into the full light of day.

"I've had a letter. I must go and see him. Can the car take me to the station?"

"The car can take you up to town," said Clara.

She rang the bell of the Tite Street house. A woman-servant, none too tidy, opened the door. Her substitution for the smart man-servant was Paula's first visible indication of the fall of the mighty. No, Sir Victor was not at home. When was he likely to return? The servant summoned an expression of blank ignorance.

"Mr. Uglow, then——"

Mr. Uglow was in. If the lady would wait she would fetch him. She disappeared. Paula remained in the hall. After a minute or two she sat in an old Spanish chair covered with Cordovan leather. A gloomy picture of the School of Riviera hung on the opposite wall.

Presently Gregory came running down the stairs with arms outstretched.

"My dear. Forgive us for leaving you here. The fool maid didn't know any better. Things have changed."

She smiled on him. What did it matter? The great thing was that she hadn't come on a fool's errand. At any rate, he was there and could tell her about Pandolfo.

"But he too is in," said Gregory. "Only he had left strict orders not to be disturbed. Don't blame the maid."

"What would happen if I disturbed him?"

"You should know better than I," replied Gregory.

"I wish I did," she said, with a touch on his arm. "I'm in the dark. What has happened? He wrote me a letter—so strange——"

"He has had a great shock. Connected of course with Lady Pandolfo's death. What it is, I don't know—he's so different."

"In what way?" she asked.

Gregory sat on the corner of the marble hall-table, by her side and tried to explain. Pandolfo, once as expansive as the north-east wind, had grown reserved and morose. He spent his nights and days in his laboratory working at the neglected inventions. He would not take even him, Gregory, into his scientific, still less into his emotional confidence. He left to Gregory, now on the eve of taking up his new duties with the Blickham-Anstruther Company, the task of business-figures, books and interviews. He insisted on the concentration of solitude. When they met for meals, now somewhat haphazardly provided, he sat pre-occupied, wringing his strong, nervous hands. The only time he had flashed out his old self was when Gregory suggested that he was ill and should consult a doctor. He declared that the whole lot should go to hell before he would see one of them. A nervous breakdown? The nerves of men like him never broke down. He had the air of one repudiating a hideous calumny.

At last Paula put the torturing question.

"Do you think that, after all, he was really fond of her?"

"To me it's inconceivable. But who knows the hearts of men?"

She rose. "I must see him. Will you tell him I'm here?" She was quick to note a shadow of pain across his pale features. She put her hands on his shoulders. "You know, if I could cut a bit off myself and give it you, I would. But I can't. Tell me where he is and I'll go to him."

He said, with an indicating gesture: "Follow the passage—the door at the end."

She turned the handle noiselessly and entered the octagonal room. Pandolfo stood, with his back turned, at the far end, engaged at the workman's bench. He looked strange to her in the long working blouse. She noticed too that his hair was dishevelled. She walked towards him and called.

"Victor."

He swung round. She suppressed a little cry at the sight of him, ill and haggard and unkempt. He advanced.

"Why have you come, Paula?"

"Do you think I have a heart of stone?"

He smiled sadly. "You have a heart of gold. All women seem to have hearts of gold."

She drew herself up. "You mean your wife who is dead. Let us go straight to the soul of things at once. It's better for both of us."

"Yes. It's better," he said.

He crossed the room to a safe which he unlocked and from it drew Nesta's letter.

"That will tell you everything."

She read, turned to put the paper gently on the table

behind her and stood there for a few seconds, confronting the issues of life and death. Then she looked at him, with a new great light of pity.

"It tells me much. But not everything. You must do that, for otherwise how can I help you?"

She led him by the arm to a couple of chairs. He obeyed with a strange docility, and told his story, in simple terms, with here and there only a dull gleam of the old Pandolfo whom, while loving, she had dreaded. And, as he talked, this change in him grew less and less a mystery. He was a beaten man; but a man beaten not by Fortune, not by the hostility of material influences, but by spiritual imponderabilia almost on the borderland of sanity and unreason; by the swift and tragic assertion of a magnanimity far exceeding his own. She slipped her hand into his and they talked between many silences. A lesser man, she felt, would have smitten his breast in specious remorse, accusing himself of a course of conduct leading to the tragedy. For the first time she saw him clearly; his greatness and his childishness. And she saw herself in the light of human relationships which, in his simplicity, he had created around them. What of the richness and warmth and vitality of her womanhood had she given or thought of giving? It is true he had demanded nothing. He had stood apart in his grandeur and, without much reference to her, had proclaimed her his mate.

But now he had lost that fascinating insolence in the abasement of his soul. She read a piteous craving in his eyes. All that was in her yearned towards him, none the less truly because it was spurred by a not ignoble jealousy. The other woman had given him her death. She, at least could give him her life. A humility sweet and purifying crept through her veins.

At last she said:

"If I'm still any use to you, I'll be to you anything you like."

It was through conspiracy between Paula and Gregory and Lady Demeter that Pandolfo was brought face to face with an eminent physician, who culminated prognostics of a condition of mental, moral and bodily decrepitude compared to which a nervous breakdown ranked as a passing headache. Absolute rest, comfort, country air were the only means of his renewing a lease of valuable life. He knew of a sanatorium in the solitudes of the Derbyshire hills, where he would be allowed to speak to nobody, read little or nothing; just breathe and eat (in moderation) and sleep.

"I should go stark, staring mad," cried Pandolfo, as the eminent physician knew he would.

"God and Hippocrates forgive me," laughed the latter, in his report to Lady Demeter, "the man's not as bad as all that, though he's tired out. But what can I do when you come to me with tears in your eyes?"

And thus did the conspiracy succeed. Pandolfo, aroused to furious wrath by the suggestion of the Derbyshire wilderness, consented to carry out a milder rest-cure at Hinsted Park. Clara promised him a wing of the house all to himself. He should see nobody. There would be nobody to see. Demeter's gout, this time serious, had developed a vicious disposition which would put him in danger of biting any lions asked down for week-ends. The only guest would be Paula, who didn't count.

"She counts so much," he cried, "that I'd die in that infernal Derbyshire place without her."

The kind and comfortable lady went about the country house, happiness incarnate.

"It's all very well to say that marriages are made in Heaven," she said to Paula. "But the best I've known of have been made in Hinsted."

She went on:

"When I telephoned you, years ago, to come down to meet him I knew he was the only man in the world for you. I'm quite aware that you scarcely credit me with a brain—but, after all, wasn't I right?"

"You wanted me to bow down and worship, my dear, which, as a self-respecting woman I refused to do."

Clara shrugged her plump shoulders.

"I wanted nothing. I only foresaw."

And she went off in oracular triumph.

Pandolfo, his will broken by the conspiracy, surrendered to the peace of the pleasant house. For the first time in his vehement, tempestuous life, did he find content in a quiet backwater. Did he show restiveness at times, with anxiety to get back to his work, there was always Paula holding out the menacing pronouncement of the Eminent Physician.

"Your idea of illness is pains and aches and spots and fevers and things. You're so crude. Do you suppose a man like Sir Erasmus John would say you're ill if you aren't? And if you weren't would you be sitting here, under a tree, perfectly happy doing nothing?"

"Perhaps you're right. But on the other hand, I don't know. I've got more work to do in the world than can be accomplished in a lifetime. If it weren't for you I should have defied Harley Street. But, you see, I've never before sat under a tree, in my life, secure in possession of my heart's desire."

There was a spell of summer weather, favouring the idyllic. The Eminent Physician had exaggerated only to gain the ends which his dearest of friends, Clara

Demeter, had put before him. He had diagnosed more keenly than he knew, for of the man's spiritual shock he was ignorant. He saw a strong man utterly tired out and prescribed the only remedy of rest. And the peace was like something God-sent to the tired man. In that tranquil old world garden the hours passed serenely in talk between the two. Day by day her love for him grew in depth and understanding. Hitherto he had hurled all his bits of amazing erudition, knowledge, criticism, like thunderbolts. Now she found herself reaping the quiet harvest of a curiously cultivated mind. His was the memory of great men—such as Macaulay and Roosevelt. A page of print, a song, a picture, a human individuality, once grasped remained his imperishable possession.

And she found that all this wonder of learning and observation had been transmuted through the crucible of the man's soul into the simplest and most tender philosophy.

They had conspired to compel him to rest. At first her finer sense of honour had been frayed. There had been also dim revolts of the lingering Diana. But now she thanked God for the conspiracy. It had brought her into intimacy with the real and wonderful spirit, in its essential simplicity that animated the Great Pandolfo.

He talked to her of his life, giving every picturesque detail that his memory had recorded. The psychological episode of Giacomo's monkey. His discovery of how to get gas for nothing. The provisions for his mother in her Empyrean of Walham Green. His struggles. His hopes. His certainties. His achievements. And all calmly and reasonably, with only here and there an instinctive Neapolitan flicker of the fingers. He talked to her of art, of the marvellous impression on his childish sensitiveness of the master-pieces of the sculpture of man-

kind wherewith he had passed his childhood's being.

He talked to her of travel, of men and things, of the fairy tales of science, of books, literature ancient and modern. Intellectually he was an inexhaustible mine of sympathy.

She thanked God that she saw him just as he was, in the paralyzing stress of utter fatigue, a richly and sweetly minded man. She knew him now, and knew that of him which she must love eternally.

In the unruffled and tender atmosphere, exhausted nerves and tired brain and perturbed soul gathered gradual strength. He began to regain eagerness of glance and elasticity of tread.

"I must get back to my work. There's a whole career to be remade. . . . You're a wonderful woman to have come to my side when I'm down in the depths. And the strange thing is that I'm contented to look to you to pull me up."

She laughed. "Your new lift will do that."

"You'll have to help me build the lift." He was silent, buried in thought for a few moments. Then: "It's a grand idea, all the same. I must get to work on the models as soon as I go back."

"I wish I had some scientific training so as to understand," she sighed.

"But it's as simple as a cat's-cradle. Look."

He pulled out paper and pencil, and boyishly began to draw the diagram. And this was the first flash of the old Pandolfo.

Then, one day later, when they sat by the old world bowling-green, as she and Gregory had sat on that May morning, it now seemed so long ago, he urged her to tell him the story of the new novel. Hitherto shyness had restrained her from discussing with anyone the half-born

thing. The opening chapters had been written, but the gestation of the full scheme was not complete. She confessed as much.

"No matter. Let us have it as it is. You can't talk comfortably on this hard bench."

He went swiftly to a disguised summer-house in the far corner and reappeared with comfortable cane chair and cushion, to which he motioned smiling command. She obeyed.

"Where shall I begin?"

"Middle or end or anywhere. With me I always begin with the end. Such a thing has to be done. How to do it?"

"That's just the difficulty."

She began haltingly, sketched out the main characters, the chief background of the tale. To tell the story he is about to write is a fearsome task for a novelist. For, Frankenstein as he is, how does he know that his monsters, however gentle they may be, may not, mid-way, defy him and, if not do him to death, at any rate tell him to go to the devil and assert their right to work out their own destinies? She felt like an uninspired adult suddenly ordered by a child to entertain it, in an original manner. At first she stumbled and took with grateful surprise a quick helping hand. Gradually beneath his eager sympathy her shyness vanished. She plunged into a dramatic story.

At the critical point she faltered. The man torn by horrible suspicion of the woman whom he regarded as an angel of purity watches her enter by night the house of another man whom he, perhaps alone of reputable morals, knows to be of the most evil character. A while afterwards she leaves the house. He meets her. There is a scene between them, at the end of which she parts from

him indignantly. The next day the wicked man is found dead with a dagger through his heart. The lover is horrified. Who else but the woman could have committed the murder?

"And there," said Paula, with a wrinkled brow, "I'm stuck. I don't see a way out of it."

He rose and put out his arms. "Why of course There's only one way. The woman *did* kill the man. Why shouldn't she? Listen. Let me tell you the whole thing now, as it occurs to me."

He threw his hat on the bench and, pacing to and fro in front of her on the green, radiantly tore up her smug and commonplace scheme, reconstructed the bits on a heroic basis and flung in dashes of colour which her orderly mind had not conceived possible. He transferred the scene of action to a romantic land, he raised the woman to a figure of Eternal Tragedy; he created a conflict of elemental passions. His disciplined imagination found delight in this new invention. Vividly Neapolitan, he acted the stirring melodrama, vibrating with its excitement, and declaiming triumphant the inevitable end.

And Paula had risen too, listening with beating pulses to this miracle whereby the dry bones of her story were made to live; wondering too at his perfervid audacity in offering her a theme which only Æschylus or Hollywood could treat.

"There!"

He stood before her victorious, with his familiar gesture of upflung arms.

"There! That's the story that we're going to write—which all the little people in the world couldn't write Haven't I told you that you and I together must conquer the earth?"

He took her by the shoulders and looked into her eyes.

"Isn't it wonderful? Our novel!"

She laughed very happily, from a woman's secret and ironic reserve of laughter surrendering herself, at last, not to the broken man who had stirred her pity, but wholly and irremediably to the flamboyant being, who, all said and done, was the Great Pandolfo.

THE END

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